

17th Sunday after Pentecost

Matthew 21:23-32.

**HYMNS: 511, 655, 556, 696, 623, 873.**

**INTROIT: Psalm 25:1-10.**

P I am lifting up my soul,

C **to You, O LORD.**

P O my God, I trust in You. Let me not be put to shame!

C **Let my enemies not gloat over me!**

P Certainly, no one who waits in hope for You will be put to shame.

C **Those who act treacherously without any reason will be put to shame.**

P Make Your ways known to me,

C **O LORD! Teach me Your paths!**

P Lead me in Your truth and teach me! For You are the God who saves me.

C **I wait in hope for You all day long.**

P Remember, O LORD, Your compassionate and merciful deeds!

C **For they have existed from eternity.**

P Do not remember the sins of my youth or my rebellious acts!

C **According to Your mercy remember me, because of Your goodness, O LORD!**

P The LORD is good and upright.

C **Therefore He teaches sinners in the way.**

P He leads humble people in what is right,

C **and teaches humble people His way.**

P All the paths of the LORD are mercy and truth

**All: for those who keep His Covenant and His Testimonies.**

**COLLECT:** Almighty God, You exulted Your Son to the place of all honour and authority, Enlighten our minds by Your Holy Spirit that, confessing Jesus as Lord, we may be led into all truth; through the same Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

**Old Testament: Ezekiel 18:1-4,25-32**

**Epistle: Philippians 2:1-18**

**Gospel: Matthew 21:23-32**

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all Amen.

The text for our sermon for this Sunday is written in the book of Matthew 21:23-32 which was our gospel reading before.

**23** When He had come to the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came to Him while He was teaching. They asked, “By what authority are You doing these things?” and “Who has given You this authority?”

**24** Jesus answered them, “I also shall ask you one thing. If you tell it to Me, I too shall tell you by what authority I am doing these things. **25** From where did the baptism of John come? Was it from heaven or from men?”

They discussed it among themselves: “If we say, ‘From heaven,’ He will ask us, ‘Then why did you not believe him?’ **26** However, if we say, ‘From men,’ — we are afraid of the crowd. For they all regard John as a prophet.”

**27** So they answered Jesus, “We do not know.”

Then He also told them, “Neither do I tell you by what authority I am doing these things.

**28 “What do you think of this? A man had two sons. He went to the first and said, ‘Son, go and work in the vineyard today!’**

**29 “He answered, ‘I do not want to.’ Later he changed his mind and went.**

**30 “The father went to the other one and told him the same thing. He answered, ‘I shall, sir,’ but he did not go.**

**31 “Which of the two did what the father wanted?”**

They answered, “The first.”

Jesus told them, “Truly, I tell you, tax-collectors and prostitutes are going into the kingdom of God ahead of you. <sup>32</sup> For John came to you teaching you the way of righteousness, but you did not believe him. The tax-collectors and prostitutes believed him. However, even when you had seen that, you did not later change your minds and believe him.

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

Peace be with you.

There's a saying that goes like this. *"It is amazing what you can get done if nobody cares who gets the credit."* This saying stands in stark contrast to the various Gospel accounts of the people who challenged Christ. The leaders in the culture of Jesus' day were all about gathering honour for themselves. Making themselves look good was job number one. That was one of the reasons that they hated Jesus. Jesus pointed out their hypocrisy. Even though they made a big deal out of the law of Moses, Jesus consistently pointed out their failure to properly understand and keep, the Laws of Moses.

The account that we heard in today's Gospel is from the Monday of Holy Week. This would be the day after Palm Sunday - the day Jesus rode into Jerusalem on the donkey and then proceeded to cleanse the temple a second time. If you back up about ten verses or so from the beginning of today's Gospel, you read these words: **"Then Jesus went into the temple and drove out all those who were selling and buying in the temple, and He overturned the tables of the moneychangers and the chairs of those who were selling doves. <sup>13</sup> He told them, “Scripture has said, ‘My house will be called a house of prayer,’ but you are making it ‘a den of robbers.’”**

**<sup>14</sup> Blind and lame people came to Him in the temple, and He healed them. <sup>15</sup> When the chief priests and the scribes saw the wonderful things He did and the children shouting “Hosanna to the Son of David!” in the temple, they were indignant. <sup>16</sup> They asked Him, “Do You hear what these are saying?” Jesus replied to them, “Yes. Have you never read: ‘Out of the mouths of infants and breast-fed babies You have prepared praise for Yourself’?”**

**<sup>17</sup> He left them, went out of the city to Bethany, and spent the night there."** [Matthew 12:12-17

So when Jesus returned to the temple the next day, the chief priests and the elders were waiting for Him. When Jesus entered the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came up to Him as He was teaching, and said, **“By what authority are You doing these things?” and “Who has given You this authority?”**

Now we need to be careful what we say about these men at this point in the reading. After all, they are the chief priests and the elders - the men who were responsible for the day to day activity in the temple. It was their calling to make sure that things were done decently and in order. They were responsible for making sure that the activity on the temple grounds conformed to the Law of Moses. So we can't criticise them for wanting to make sure that Jesus had the authority to do what He did. Up to this point in the Gospel, these men are just doing their job.

Jesus actually honoured their query with a question of His own. This was not only an accepted tradition of that culture even today, but the question contained within it, the answer to their inquiry. Jesus answered them, **"I also shall ask you one thing. If you tell it to Me, I too shall tell you by what authority I am**

**doing these things. The baptism of John, from where did it come? From heaven or from man?"** This question told the high priests and elders that His authority and John's authority come from the same place.

It's at this point in today's Gospel that we get some insight into the true nature of these chief priests and elders. They were more concerned about their image than they were about the truth. They were not in any way, shape, or form interested in the right answer to Jesus' question. Instead, they were concerned about their standing before the people. **They discussed it among themselves: "If we say, 'From heaven,' He will ask us, 'Then why did you not believe him?' 26 However, if we say, 'From men,' — we are afraid of the crowd. For they all regard John as a prophet."27** So they answered Jesus, **"We do not know."** Instead of following the laws of Moses and honouring the truth, these temple authorities honour their own agenda. Their God is not the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, but their own agenda is their God, their egos.

Jesus responded to their hypocrisy with the parable about the two sons. The story of the first son reflects the life of the Christian. The story of the second son reflects the life of the hypocrite.

Each and every one of us comes into this world in rebellion against God. Our answer to His invitation is "NO". Then God brings His Law and Gospel to bear. He makes us aware of our sin and our desperate need for a saviour. Then He reveals that saviour to us in the person and work of Jesus Christ. Eventually, the Holy Spirit works faith in us and we receive God's "YES" in Christ. This is the process of conversion for all Christians.

The hypocrite rejects God's Law and Gospel. He learns to put on a show for his peers. He appears to say yes, - but this is an empty promise that he won't keep.

Jesus made the point of His parable with these words, **"Truly, I tell you, tax-collectors and prostitutes are going into the kingdom of God ahead of you. 32 For John came to you teaching you the way of righteousness, but you did not believe him. The tax-collectors and prostitutes believed him. However, even when you had seen that, you did not later change your minds and believe him."**

The tax collectors and prostitutes understood that they were sinners. That message of condemnation came through loud and clear from the culture. Tax collectors and prostitutes knew that they deserved both temporal and eternal punishment. When John preached repentance for the forgiveness of sins, they knew that this forgiveness was their only hope. They repented and they received the Kingdom of Heaven.

The temple authorities refused to believe that they deserved any punishment. Therefore John's message had no meaning for them. There is no Gospel where there is no acknowledgement of sin.

When Jesus told that parable in today's Gospel, His primary audience was those temple authorities who challenged Him, but He speaks to us as well. The war that began in us on the day that the Holy Spirit planted faith in our hearts continues and a day doesn't go by that we don't play the part of both sons. At times we scream "NO" in God's face until He draws us to Himself through the words of the Gospel and He gives us the ability to say, "Yes." Other times we say, "Yes!" with our lips, but our hearts are far from God.

Our rebellion is the product of the sinful nature that our parents give us at conception. This sinful nature battles against the holy nature God gave us when the Holy Spirit worked faith in our hearts, and these two natures will battle within us until the day we die.

Fortunately, there is a third son. He is not in the parable. Instead, He is the one who's telling the parable. Martin Luther described this son very well in the sixth stanza of the hymn [LSB 556] ***"Dear Christians, One and All Rejoice." The Son obeyed His Father's will, was born of virgin mother; And God's good pleasure to fulfill, He came to be my brother. His royal power disguised He bore; a servant's form like mine He wore to lead the devil captive.*** This Son said, "Yes Sir!" To His Father and then obeyed Him perfectly.

His Father said, "You need to be human." The Son said, "Yes sir!" and was born of the Virgin Mary. The Father said, "You need to humiliate Yourself under the law." The Son said, "Yes sir!" and lived a life that was perfectly free from sin. The Father said, "You need to exchange Your perfection for the sin of the world." The Son said, "Yes sir!" and He became the greatest sinner - not with His sin, but with Our sin, and the sin of the entire world. The Father said, "Now, carry that sin to the cross." The Son said, , **"My Father,**

**if it is possible, let this cup pass away from Me! Nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will!"** [Matthew 26:39.]

The Father said, "Now, take that sin to the grave." The Son said, **"Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit."** **After He had said this, He breathed His last.** [Luke 23:46.]

The Father said, "Now, proclaim Your victory to the world." Then Jesus rose from the dead and He said to His disciples, **"These are the very words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, namely, that everything written about Me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms must be fulfilled."**<sup>45</sup> **Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures.** <sup>46</sup> **He told them, "This is what Scripture has said: 'The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day;'** <sup>47</sup> **and on the basis of His name, repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.'** [Luke 24:44-47.]

We are often like the sons in the parable. Sometimes, we fight God's will until His love brings us into the Kingdom of Heaven. Other times we say yes quickly with no intention of keeping our promise. Jesus is not like either son. He agreed immediately and obeyed perfectly. He has done all things well and in Him we have forgiveness, salvation, and eternal life.

Our sin is gone. Jesus Christ, God's Son, in perfect obedience to His Father has taken it away. It's left behind in the grave. It will forever remain dead and buried. We, on the other hand, will rise from the dead just as our older brother rose and live with our Heavenly Father, our Older Brother Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit forever. We know this because God has given us His promise to do this and He never breaks a promise. **Amen**

**3rd Hymn: 556.**

### **Prayer of the Church 17th Sunday after Pentecost 2017**

**P** Let us come before the Lord with confidence, presenting our prayers and supplications to Him in the name of our Lord, Jesus Christ, on behalf of His Church and all people according to their needs.

*Brief silence*

**P** Blessed Lord, all souls belong to You, and Your ways are more than just. In mercy, You have rescued Your people from their sins and restored them to life through the death and resurrection of Your only Son. Deliver us from pride and presumption, and teach us to rejoice in Your mercy and to delight in Your love. Lord, in Your mercy,

**C** **hear our prayer.**

**P** Almighty God, Your Son humbled Himself to be born among us in our flesh and to be obedient to Your saving will even to death. Give us Your Holy Spirit so that we may know and confess rightly Your Son before the world and joyfully serve You with a willing heart. Lord, in Your mercy,

**C** **hear our prayer.**

**P** Holy Father, with His own blood our Lord established His Church, washed us clean in baptismal water and clothed us with His own righteousness. Give to Your Church — to her pastors, and all church workers, and to each of us, the baptized — an obedient heart, that we may believe the Gospel with all our hearts and do the will of our Father in heaven. Lord, in Your mercy,

**C** **hear our prayer.**

**P** Mighty Father, all the might of man is nothing before You, and yet You have appointed earthly realms and rulers for the punishment of those who do wrong and to honour those who do right. Give us faithful leaders who will serve honourably and well. Bless especially those who serve in the armed forces to defend us and protect our freedoms. Lord, in Your mercy,

**C** **hear our prayer.**

**P** Creator of all things, instil within us hearts of wonder before all Your majestic work. Give us the useful arts of science and industry, that we may use Your resources for the good of Your people and take

responsible care of all You have made. Prevent us from the misuse both of Your gifts and our reason, lest we bring harm upon ourselves and others. Lord, in Your mercy,

**C hear our prayer.**

P Merciful Lord, You are the strength of the weak, the hope of those who despair and the Great Physician of body and soul. Give to the sick healing according to Your will, grace to support them in their afflictions, patience and endurance when relief does not come, and peace at the last. *[Hear us especially for*

*] Lord, in Your mercy,*

**C hear our prayer.**

P Gracious Lord, Your Son has set His table among us. Give us Your Holy Spirit, that we may approach the blessed feast of His body and blood with a repentant heart, a confident faith and a willingness to reflect in our lives the precious gifts we receive in this blest communion. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Ever-living One, Your Son is the resurrection and the life. Receive our thanks for the faithful who have gone before us, and grant us our portion at the end with Your saints in light. Lord, in Your mercy,

**C hear our prayer.**

All things are Yours, holy Father, and we are Yours. Hear us in the name of and for the sake of Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

**C Amen.**

**4th Hymn:696,**