

Daily Discipleship

Sunday, September 25-October 1 (A)– Matthew 21:23-32

The Challenge of Discipleship: *Responsible Living*

Focus Question: *What makes you change your mind?*

word of life

“Which of the two did the will of his father?” Matthew 21:31 (NRSV)

Read Matthew 21:23-32

Power and authority are key issues in the context of this week’s reading. Between this week’s lesson and last week’s parable of the laborers in the vineyard, Matthew describes a gathering storm of controversy over Jesus’ authority. Jesus foretells his death and resurrection (20:17-19), only to have the mother of the disciples James and John ask for her sons to be in a position of authority in Jesus’ kingdom. (Matthew 20:20-28) Jesus enters in triumph into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday and promptly overturns the tables of the money-changers in the temple. (Matthew 21:1-7)

The multitudes are following Jesus; after all, he reaches out to the outcasts and sinners. The religious leaders are threatened and question his authority. They confront Jesus in the temple. Their weapons are barbed questions; Jesus responds with the parable of the two sons. (Matthew 21:28-32)

1. *What word of challenge and judgment is in this parable?*
2. *Count the number of times the word “authority” is used in this passage. What is at stake over the issue of authority?*

Once again, the setting of the parable is the vineyard – the place where the landowner offered free, unmerited grace in the previous parable. (Matthew 20:1-16) Now the hearer is challenged with the implications of this grace. Such grace leads to changed minds and hearts – repentance. This change is seen in the first son, who at first refuses the invitation and call to work in the vineyard, but later experiences a change of heart and goes to work. He experiences a change of mind that leads to a change of life. In contrast is the second son, who initially says, “Yes,” to his father’s invitation but then fails to respond.

3. *What is the relationship between faith, repentance, and response?*
4. *With which son do you relate? Why?*
5. *Imagine a conversation between the two sons at the end of the day. What would it be like?*
6. *Imagine a conversation between the mother and father of these two sons. What would it be like?*

Grace is amazing – and challenging. It is amazing in its breadth – the outcast, the sinner, the least expected are all included. And it challenges the usual, expected, acceptable order. It offers the freedom to change and be changed. And it calls forth trust and belief.

The first son experiences the grace to turn back from his first word and offer the “yes” of faith. The second son knows the right words to say but fails to put the words into practice. The tax collectors and the prostitutes seem at first glance to say “no” to God; but their hearts are open to God’s message and messenger. In contrast, the religious leaders and scribes appear to be obedient – to say “yes” to God; but they have failed to be open to God’s life-changing grace.

7. *How does grace lead to changed lives – to repentance?*
8. *What word of grace is in this parable?*

word *among us*

Imagine picking up the morning paper and discovering that you had died the day before! That happened years ago as a newspaper erroneously reported the death of a famous man. The error gave the man the interesting opportunity to read what people would say about him after he had died.

So he began to read. He read past the bold caption that said, “Dynamite king dies,” to the text itself. He was taken aback to find that he was described as “a merchant of death,” for he was the inventor of dynamite and had amassed a great fortune from it.

The description in the newspaper sparked a change. Did he really want to be remembered this way? In that moment, he experienced a healing power greater than the destructive force of dynamite. He changed his life direction and devoted his energy and money to works of peace and human betterment. Today, he is best remembered as the founder of the Nobel Peace Prize – Alfred Nobel – all because he had the grace-filled experience to see himself as others saw him and the freedom to set his life in a different direction.

1. *What are examples in your own life when you changed your mind and commitment in order to follow Christ?*
2. *How might God’s grace lead us to responsible living?*
3. *What does “responsible living” mean?*

Grace leads to a change of heart – to repentance, which is an awesome and sometimes terrifying gift. Repentance forces us to look at ourselves honestly and acknowledge our failings, our times of saying, “yes” and then not doing anything, or our times of saying “no” when we should have said, “yes.”

4. *Give an example in your own life when you said no, but later changed your mind.*
5. *Which person would you rather work beside: the one who says no, but comes through or the one who says yes, but doesn’t show up?*
6. *How can we develop the quality of our “yes” meaning “yes”?*

But repentance is also a grace-filled gift because it leads us back to the grace of God, where we are reminded that we are not ultimately bound by our past actions and by what we have done, but by what God in Christ has done for us. The question becomes, “What do we do with such unbridled grace – grace that both judges and forgives, grace that includes both those inside the religiously acceptable circle as well as those who are seemingly on the outside?” This is the challenge for the Christian disciple.

7. *Why is God’s grace so challenging to receive?*
8. *How is your life different because of God’s grace?*

Prayer

Loving God, receive our repentant spirit and make us new. Amen

Dig Deeper

Psalm 51:10-17

last word

This week, ponder your “yes” and “no”.

Do your decisions
consistently serve Christ?



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Sept. 25-Oct. 1 (A) Page 1 of 2