

Pentecost 18-October 1, 2023

Baltic and East Nidaros Lutheran Parish

Matthew 21:23-32

"Interrupted by Jesus" Sermon by Pastor Randall J. Questad

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from his Son, Jesus Christ. Amen

It doesn't feel very nice to be interrupted. When you are, you know that the interrupters are not listening to what you are saying, and they can't wait and in fact they don't wait until you are done speaking and they start to tell you what they feel is more important than what you are saying. Jesus was used to this happening to him by the religious leaders. The gospel of John records when a woman was caught in the very act of adultery by leaders of the church and felt they could not wait until Jesus finished his bible study in the temple before interrupting him and telling him what they had discovered. So, they didn't. They interrupted what Jesus was teaching and quizzed him what he was going to do about this woman who clearly had broken the 6th commandment. As you just heard in today's gospel reading, the chief priests and the elders of the church interrupted Jesus while he was teaching in the temple. In this scene, there was a group of people who were sitting at the feet of Jesus listening to what he had to say, while this gathering of church leaders felt they had something much more important to ask Jesus than what they might learn from what he was teaching.

Of course, as we know, you can't throw Jesus off track by interrupting his train of thought. In fact, Jesus himself is a master at interruptions. However, when Jesus does the interrupting, his timing is perfect, and his words are of more value. It seems that Jesus interrupted Peter almost every time that he opened his mouth. I can think of at least three times when scripture says and while Peter was speaking, Jesus stops him before Peter swallows any more of his food. God interrupted Moses from his work as a shepherd by speaking to him through a burning bush in the wilderness. Jesus interrupted Saul's persecution of Christians by blinding him with a bright light as he walked on the road to Damascus. Jesus interrupted the conversation between Clepas and Simon as they walked on the road to Emmaus. And today's gospel reading is another example of when Jesus out-interrupts the chief priests and the elders when he doesn't answer their question about where he got his authority to do the things, he was doing by asking another question.

In fairness, it was the duty of the chief priests and elders to ask Jesus where he got his authority. These leaders were to protect what was being taught in the church. What little they were taking the time to hear Jesus say was troubling to them. This preacher with a background in carpentry had not received any formal credentialing process from these church leaders and the good news that he was recklessly delivering to the crowds was not following their rules in any way shape or form. So, it was indeed their duty to ask him about where he had received his authority for all that he was doing.

Jesus didn't really hear the question by the peculiar response he made. They asked a straightforward question which could have been answered with a straightforward response. But Jesus knew the hearts of his questioners and he also knew that they would never be satisfied with his response.

Jesus was fair in promising that he would answer their question if they could answer his question. Jesus interrupted their train of thought about authority by asking about John the Baptist and the baptisms that he was performing. But really, Jesus asked them the same question by having them confess to him by what authority John was baptizing. Did these baptisms come from God or were they his own idea? Jesus gave them one question and he even gave them the two possible answers. A quiz can't get much easier than having a 50 percent chance of getting it right. The students who received their bibles today would have no problem giving the right answer about whose authority is found throughout their bibles. They learned that

from the beginning of the bible when God created all things to the end of the bible where God will make all things new, God has the authority to do what he chooses. But the leaders of the church had to think about their response and how their response might affect their image. After deliberating among themselves, they decided that the safest answer they could give was just to shrug their shoulders and say, "We don't know."

Then to confuse them even further, Jesus tells them a parable about two sons. This parable almost seems like Jesus' Reader's Digest version of the parable of the prodigal son. There are many similarities. In both parables, there are two sons. In both, one son is disobedient and wanders off, but later repents and returns. In both, the second son wants his father to know how obedient he always has been. Jesus fires a second question to the religious leaders about which son did the will of his father? Without the need for a time out to deliberate this question, they quickly answer, "The first". Look to see if you can see anywhere in the gospel reading for today that Jesus commends them for coming up with the right answer. Instead, Jesus simply tells them that the tax collectors and the prostitutes will enter the kingdom of God ahead of them. That doesn't sound like Jesus thought they had given the right answer. The chief priests and the elders liked both sons because they were the ones that were doing something. They might have thought that it was the sons who had the authority to do as they chose.

The Holy Spirit has interrupted you from doing other things this morning so that you could hear Jesus speak to you about his authority and what that means for you. John the Baptist gathered a crowd of people that were also drawn to him by the Holy Spirit. John the Baptist did not claim that he had any authority that came from within him to do what he was doing. John the Baptist always pointed away from himself and pointed toward Jesus whose authority was given to him by his Father. John the Baptist was not a flashy charismatic speaker who preached what the crowd wanted to hear. John the Baptist preached a baptism of repentance. The second son who did no wrong would have no reason to be baptized since he had nothing to repent of. This was the problem with the second son. But the first son had a problem too. You can't dismiss that he was disobedient even though he admitted his faults and, in the end, did the will of his father.

You and I might know of times when we have been either or both sons. Times when we feel like we are doing all the right things and making good choices and there are times when we know we have failed miserably. The good news for us is that regardless of which son we might be, there is another Son. A Son that this class of students who are receiving bibles today were reminded of when they looked up John 3:16. They discovered that his Father loved the world so much that he sent his Son into the world to save it. This Son has saved you.

It is also by this same authority given by the Father which has claimed Tate Michael Tidemann today as his beloved child in the waters of baptism. It is also by the same authority that we could gather in the East Nidaros cemetery this Wednesday surrounded by gravestones and without any hesitation proclaim the promise of eternal life for Norman Nielsen because Jesus said that on the last day, he would raise all believers from their graves to live eternally with him.

It is good news that Jesus has interrupted you from your busy schedules with His words that ARE more important than what anyone else may have to say to you. Jesus' words of promise given in baptism like, "You are now my beloved child. You are mine." Daily words of hope like. "I will be with you no matter what you may face today". Words of confidence when death arrives, "In my Father's house are many rooms. I have gone to prepare a place for you." And today you will hear these words from Jesus, "This is my body and blood shed for you for the forgiveness of your sins." Amen