

Sermon for October 1, 2017 “Which Did the Father’s Will?”

Matthew 21:23-32

It was shortly after the ruckus in the fellowship hall. You know when Jesus turned over all the tables at the bazaar. Well, he was sittin’ on the front steps of the church and a bunch of people came and sat around him. And he was tellin’ them about the Kingdom of God and stuff. Well one of the associate preachers and a few of the deacons came up and began askin’ questions.

“Excuse me Jesus, do you have a permit to hold a Sunday School class here?” “Who gave you permission to start a new Bible Study?” One of the deacon interjected, “Has your curriculum been approved by the Sunday School Board and did you even bother to check the Discipline to make sure it agrees with church teaching?”

Jesus said, “Well, what about John the Baptist? Who gave him permission to teach? It weren’t no Sunday School Board or Education Commission. So it was either God or he was just talkin’ through his hat!”

The Preacher and the deacons put their heads together. If we say “From God” then they will say “Why didn’t you agree with him.” And then every fly-by-night self-styled prophet will claim the same authority. But if we say that John had no authority, the people will get mad because they liked John. Then they might not pay up on their pledges! So they said, “We’ll have the check on that.”

So Jesus said something like this: Once there was a man who had two boys. He went to the first one’s bed room and stuck his head in the door. The boy was playing video games. He said, “Son, could you please go clean out the garage.” The boy said, “Daad! I’m playing with my Nintari Cube! I have the Lords of Chaos all cornered in the 6th dimension. If I can finish them off I will be Conqueror of the Cosmos.” But later on, after he lost his last battle star in the 8th dimension and was sent back the level 1 he thought, “You know Dad does a lot for me. He bought me the totally awesome Nintari Cube 26.7. He feeds me, and provides a house. If cleaning the garage will make him happy, I guess I can do that.” So he put down his joy stick and went to the garage.

The father went to the other son’s room where he was reading his Bible and said, “Son, please mow the yard today.” The boy said, “Sure Dad, whatever you say.” But then he got thinking. It’s awful hot out today. That old lawnmower is a pain to start. I might have an allergy attack from all that pollen and dust. I’ll just stay right here. What I’m doing now is more important.

When he finished the story Jesus asked the crowd, “Which son did the Father’s will?” Well everyone could see it was the first one. Even though he said he wouldn’t, he had a change of heart and in the end he did what the father asked. But the other son just gave the father lip service and didn’t really obey. So Jesus looked at the preacher and deacons and said, “You see, some of the people you called sinners are entering the kingdom ahead of you. Because you did not pay attention to John but some of those so called sinners did.”

It’s clear that Jesus was talking about the Chief Priests and Elders in his little story. You see, it was the job of the elders and priests to teach the people about God’s will. Jesus was trespassing on their turf. He was teaching the people right there in the temple precincts. So they questioned his authority. Who was this Carpenter of Nazareth to be teaching in the Temple of the Most Holy God!

Who was Jesus? You and I know he was the Son of God. He had every right to teach in the temple or anywhere else he wanted to. His authority was from God. The question was where was their authority?

So Jesus told a story about a son who did the father’s will despite refusing at first. And a son who simply paid the father lip service. The crowds were turning from sin to do God’s will. The religious leaders on the other hand were just giving God lip service. In the end Jesus was questioning their authority to teach about a God they really were not serving.

Which all begs the question: “Are you doing the Father’s will?” Which son are you? Which am I? We all rebel from time to time like the first son. We would rather play with our video games, then roll up our sleeves and clean up the messes in the world. But at the end of the day, do we really try to do God’s will? Or do we simply pay God lip service?

Now, we are all good church people here. We all read our Bibles and come to church and Sunday school, right? Well, more or less. But do we live that outside of the church. When we leave this “churchy” atmosphere do we live out all these nice things we talk about in church?

Jesus is being practical here. It’s not what you say or originally intend to do that matters. The question is “In the end, what do you end up doing?” Do you seek to do the father’s will, or are you just giving God lip service?

This is not just a rhetorical question! This questions demands an answer. But don’t give the answer here. You give the answer to this questions this afternoon after you leave church. And then tomorrow and the day after and the day after. How you live your life is the answer to this question!