

Matthew 21:23-32

18th Sunday after Pentecost

When Jesus entered the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came to him as he was teaching, and said, "By what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?" Jesus said to them, "I will also ask you one question; if you tell me the answer, then I will also tell you by what authority I do these things. Did the baptism of John come from heaven, or was it of human origin?" And they argued with one another, "If we say, 'From heaven,' he will say to us, 'Why then did you not believe him?' But if we say, 'Of human origin,' we are afraid of the crowd; for all regard John as a prophet." So they answered Jesus, "We do not know." And he said to them, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things.

"What do you think? A man had two sons; he went to the first and said, 'Son, go and work in the vineyard today.' He answered, 'I will not'; but later he changed his mind and went. The father went to the second and said the same; and he answered, 'I go, sir'; but he did not go. Which of the two did the will of his father?" They said, "The first." Jesus said to them, "Truly I tell you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are going into the kingdom of God ahead of you. For John came to you in the way of righteousness and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes believed him; and even after you saw it, you did not change your minds and believe him.

This Gospel passage reiterates one of Jesus' recurring messages to us; that what we *do* matters more than what we say or what we claim to believe. Jesus makes this point again and again in the Scriptures, perhaps most powerfully in the parable of the sheep and goats (Matthew 25:31-46) where he says; "Then they also will answer, 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you?' Then he will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.'

At no point in the gospels does Jesus ever say that our salvation hinges on holding exactly the correct beliefs or saying exactly the right words. What he does say, again and again, is that can trust Him and rely upon Him *and* that we should model lives on His example. Jesus came to live among us not just so he could offer himself to death, but so that we could see what a life lived within the will and love of God should look like.

To follow Jesus means just that, to follow – to step where he steps, to do what he does. As St James wrote in his epistle, we must be *doers* of the Word. Of course, that doesn't mean that we all need to become itinerant preachers and healers. It does mean though that there are practices we should all incorporate into our lives, practices that will lead us closer to God's hopes and dreams for us and which will bring to us the abundant life that Jesus invites us into.

In reading the gospels, I believe that the life Jesus shows us six fundamental practices that should form the core of our Christian commitment. If you've read my reflections before you will find these familiar; worship, prayer, service, study, sabbath, and generosity.

We should worship God, because it reminds us of the centrality of God to our lives and it brings us together with others for whom we can share the journey of faith. We should pray because we cannot have a relationship with God, we cannot really know God if we never seek to speak with God. We should serve others because it is the only real source of contentment and satisfaction in this life and because as humans created in the image of the trinitarian God, we are only truly ourselves within relationships. We should know the story of God and of God's project of salvation as told in the Scriptures because when we learn how God has acted in the past it helps us to better see God at work in the present. We should practice sabbath, because it is an opportunity to connect and re-connect with what is most vital to our well-being; to God, to creation, and to those whom we love. And, of course, we should practice generosity, which isn't generous generosity with our money, but generosity of spirit; it is the practice of humility, empathy, open-mindedness, and curiosity and because it helps us to keep in mind that all that we have isn't really ours but is, in truth, God's because all we have comes from God's creation.

The way of peace, the path to abundant life, and the entrance into the heavenly kingdom, all require that we get moving and the way move along the path of Christ is to do these things that Jesus did.