

17th Sunday after Pentecost September 27, 2020

16th Sunday after Trinity Proper 21 (26)
Lectionary Year A – the Gospel of Matthew

Living the Lutheran Lectionary

A weekly study of the Scriptures for the coming Sunday since May 4, 2014.

An opportunity to make Sunday worship more meaningful and to make the rhythms of the readings part of the rhythms of your life.

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<https://clergystuff.com/daily-devotions/matthew-2123-27-the-authority-of-jesus-questioned>

Hymn of the Day

Lutheran Service Book (LSB) 655 The Lutheran Hymnal (TLH) 261

“Lord, keep us steadfast in Your Word”

“In the first part of the sixteenth century, not only was the young Lutheran church dealing with the conflicts of the Reformation, but the Ottoman Empire was also making inroads onto the European continent. 1521 marked Luther’s confrontation with the Holy Roman Empire at Worms, Germany. In 1530, the Lutherans presented their confession to the Empire and to the Roman Catholic Church at Augsburg. Near the same time, Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent was leading the armies of the Ottoman Empire into the Kingdom of Hungary in 1526, attacking Hapsburg Vienna in 1529 and 1532, invading Moldavia in 1538 and taking the twin Hungarian cities of Buda and Pest in 1541. Luther included this joint threat in his hymn of 1541/1542. The opening stanza originally listed both enemies of the Gospel: “Lord, keep us in Thy Word and work, / Restrain the murderous Pope and Turk, / Who fain would tear from off Thy throne / Christ Jesus, Thy beloved Son.” In time, these particular enemies became the more general enemies of Christ’s Church, as shown in stanza 1.” Study by Marion Lars Hendrickson

- <https://www.lcms.org/worship/hymn-of-the-day-studies>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YQV7smcfkBc> “This is a simple yet powerful arrangement for any size choir. While the vocal parts are relatively easy, the more challenging accompaniment gives the piece forward drive...” Northwestern Publishing House, nph.net, product # 286072E
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eSoP-MF6Zs0> “Rejoice in God's gift of hymnody, recorded at Concordia University in Seward, NE during the 2015 Higher Things youth conferences.”
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tXx0raYtC4Y> Jeff Windoloski
 “ As a confessional Lutheran (LCMS) organist, I seek to bring the chorales and hymns of the Lutheran church's rich musical heritage to the world through YouTube. This YouTube channel is all about providing you with first-rate and exceptional renditions of historical music from the time of the Reformation, and after that you can enjoy in your homes and on your mobile devices. This is completed through Sunday uploads at 9:00 AM EST on YouTube to my subscribers and the greater Lutheran audience.”
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=afCERFJqw8w>
 Return to Wittenberg, “The Recessional hymn for the Closing Service of [#R2W2017](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=afCERFJqw8w): Blessed Martin Luther's renowned "Lord, Keep us Steadfast in Thy Word," including the two supplemental verses by Justus Jonas, and concluding with Luther's setting of Da Pacem (including Johann Walther's second verse)”...
 “Walter Raffel...Love this hymn. Thank you for using the correct words in the first verse.” *Curious? Follow the link to see the verses.*

Commentaries have been chosen because the author has written in a way that compliments the reading. Not all of the commentaries are from Lutheran sources. They have been edited for length and in some cases for additional content that is not in keeping with a Lutheran understanding of Scripture. Links are provided for those who wish to read the entire commentary.

The Holy Bible, English Standard Version. ESV® Text Edition: 2016. Copyright © 2001
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O. T. - "For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the Lord GOD..."

Psalm – "O my God, in you I trust;"

Epistle – "Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility"

Gospel – "***I also will ask you one question... What do you think?***"

Ezekiel 18:1-4, 25-32; Revised Common Lectionary (RCL), Exodus 17:1-7 or Ezekiel 18:1-4, 25-32 (Next week: Isaiah 5:1-7; RCL, Exodus 20:1-4, 7-9, 12-20 or Isaiah 5:1-7)

"The parents have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge" (Ezekiel 18:1).

It was a popular saying in Ezekiel's time. It was also a dangerous saying. It was a proverb that would lead a people from sickness to death. These simple words had seduced them to surrender, to resignation, because in the face of horrible pain they could see no way out. Instead of asking what they could change, they told each other that they had no choice: suffering was the only option available. Someone else had seen to that long ago.

Ezekiel refutes the deadly proverb with logic that sounds harsh, but in fact holds out life-giving grace. Before we can understand what was at stake in refuting the proverb, we need to get behind it. What was this about? The text gives us our first clue: it concerns "the land of Israel." (continued after the reading)

The Soul Who Sins Shall Die Verses 1-32 (God deals Justly with Individuals – NASB)

18 The word of the LORD came to me: ² "What do you^[a] mean by repeating this proverb concerning the land of Israel, 'The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge'? ³ As I live, declares the Lord GOD, this proverb shall no more be used by you in Israel. ⁴ Behold, all souls are mine; the soul of the father as well as the soul of the son is mine: the soul who sins shall die.

⁵ *"If a man is righteous and does what is just and right...*

¹⁰ *"If he fathers a son who is violent...*

¹⁴ *"Now suppose this man fathers a son who sees all the sins that his father has done... ¹⁹ "Yet you say, 'Why should not the son suffer for the iniquity of the father?'..."*

21 “But if a wicked person turns away from all his sins that he has committed and keeps all my statutes and does what is just and right, he shall surely live; he shall not die...”

25 “Yet you say, ‘The way of the Lord is not just.’ Hear now, O house of Israel: Is my way not just? Is it not your ways that are not just? **26** When a righteous person turns away from his righteousness and does injustice, he shall die for it; for the injustice that he has done he shall die. **27** Again, when a wicked person turns away from the wickedness he has committed and does what is just and right, he shall save his life. **28** Because he considered and turned away from all the transgressions that he had committed, he shall surely live; he shall not die. **29** Yet the house of Israel says, ‘The way of the Lord is not just.’ O house of Israel, are my ways not just? Is it not your ways that are not just?”

30 “Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways, declares the Lord GOD. Repent and turn from all your transgressions, lest iniquity be your ruin.^[b] **31** Cast away from you all the transgressions that you have committed, and make yourselves a new heart and a new spirit! Why will you die, O house of Israel? **32** For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the Lord GOD; so turn, and live.”

- a. [Ezekiel 18:2](#) The Hebrew for *you* is plural
- b. [Ezekiel 18:30](#) Or *lest iniquity be your stumbling block (NASB)*

“Imagine: We are in Babylonia, among the first wave of Judean exiles, before the fall of Jerusalem. This Jewish community in Babylonia was forcibly deported from Judah, from “the land of Israel.” After a violent and bloody siege, they had walked hundreds of miles as captives, humiliated on this journey only to be ruled in the land of their captors. The flood plain where they now settled was a far cry from the hills of Judah they had left behind. But their concern for the land of Israel extended beyond their humiliation, beyond their loss, beyond their longing: they had left loved ones behind. Their homeland was still in danger. The holy city and temple, once thought to be inviolate, would not withstand the great empire forever. Babylon had not finished with Judah, and Ezekiel promised them that Jerusalem's hour was coming.

This was all too much. They could not have deserved what they had suffered. If God was as powerful as Ezekiel claimed, they reasoned that God must have willed these disasters. God had brought exile and destruction as punishment for sins, as promised by the prophets. But whose sins? The exiles in Babylonia were convinced that it wasn't their fault: they were paying the price for the crimes of generations past.

This neat saying about sour grapes absolved Ezekiel's contemporaries from any responsibility for their current situation. They could point the finger far into the past and moan about picking up the pieces after earlier generations had made a mess of things.

God cuts them short. "As I live," says God, you won't be reciting this proverb anymore (18:3). God's speech grounds their responsibility in the fact that God is a living God, dynamic, engaged in the present life of the people just as much as God had been in their past. "All lives are mine," says God. The parents, yes, *and also* the children. The life of this present generation is God's, and what God brings into the present is *for them* and *about them*. They can stop looking back, and start looking around. This is their moment with God.

The lectionary text skips now from verse 4 to verse 25. The verses in between further underscore the responsibility of the present generation. Ezekiel undercuts any illusions that they are righteous children suffering for the crimes of unrighteous parents. If they suffer for crimes, the crimes are their own. But for precisely that reason there is always a way out, a way forward. The prophet now begins to point the way forward through repentance, the way out of death to life. The wicked can turn from sin and live. At the same time, the righteous can fall from virtue and die. Crimes and merits of the past will not weigh in the balance.

This can't be right. "The way of the Lord is unfair! (*lô yitâkçn*)" (18:25). The base (*qal*) meaning of the verbal root used here, (*tâkan*) is "to determine according to size or weight." The *niphal* (middle-passive) form that occurs in this passage means "to measure up, be in order, be correct."¹ The charge against God is that God is not dealing honestly. Shouldn't all crimes and merits be weighed in the balance against one another? Instead, God's focus on the present would throw out a lifetime of virtue, or a lifetime of sin, letting them count for nothing in the scales of judgment.

God's answer is that *God's* measures are certainly in order. It is the people of Israel who are using faulty measures. They are willing to throw away their own life, which is worth everything. God turns the charge around to show that it is not about fairness after all. It is about the ultimate value: life. God holds out life to the house of Israel. The one way to life is not by atoning for someone else's sins: that is no kind of life, and it is not their responsibility. The way to life is simple: "Repent and turn" (18:30).

- http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=159 [Anathea Portier-Young](#)
Associate Professor of Old Testament, Duke University Divinity School, Durham, N.C.

Psalm 25:1-10; RCL, Psalm 78:1-4, 12-16 or Psalm 25:1-9 (Psalm 80:7-19; RCL, Psalm 19 or Psalm 80:7-15)

This Psalm is also used on the First Sunday in Lent, Year B and the First Sunday in Advent, Year C.

"Psalm 25 is one of several poems in the Hebrew psalter that is an acrostic, which means that each successive line of this psalm begins with the next letter of the alphabet. Since the Hebrew alphabet has twenty-two letters, Psalm 25 has twenty-two lines, the first one beginning with the Hebrew equivalent of the letter "A," the second one starting with the letter "B" and so on down to the equivalent of the letter "Z" in the last line (this larger unifying frame is another reason not to cut off the reading at verse 10).

One of the reasons psalms got written as acrostics was to help people memorize the poem. In a time when no one had access to books or any other kind of printed material, people had to memorize everything. They could not just go and "look it up" in their own personal copies of the Bible. By composing a poem as an acrostic people would have an easier time memorizing it. The ABC pattern is a mnemonic device.

Perhaps this psalmist wanted to make sure that people could memorize his poem for two reasons: **first**, because he knew how well his poetic sentiments fit in with real life. This psalm is something worth carrying around with you as you lead a similarly real life of sin, suffering, hurt, and disappointment. But **second**, and just as importantly, this psalmist wanted to remind people that in and through all these varied experiences is ever and always the need to be instructed by God. The psalmist wanted people to memorize a poem about instruction by God because it is precisely the very act of memorization—of rehearsing something over and over until you make it a part of who you are—that is the key...” (Continued after the reading)

Teach Me Your Paths ¹⁹ Of David. Verses 1-22

- 25** To you, O LORD, I lift up my soul.
2 O my God, in you I trust;
 let me not be put to shame;
 let not my enemies exult over me.
3 Indeed, none who wait for you shall be put to shame;
 they shall be ashamed who are wantonly treacherous.
4 Make me to know your ways, O LORD;
 teach me your paths.
5 Lead me in your truth and teach me,
 for you are the God of my salvation;
 for you I wait all the day long.
6 Remember your mercy, O LORD, and your steadfast love,
 for they have been from of old.
7 Remember not the sins of my youth or my transgressions;
 according to your steadfast love remember me,
 for the sake of your goodness, O LORD!
8 Good and upright is the LORD;
 therefore he instructs sinners in the way.
9 He leads the humble in what is right,
 and teaches the humble his way.
10 All the paths of the LORD are steadfast love and faithfulness,
 for those who keep his covenant and his testimonies...

***17** The troubles of my heart are enlarged;
 bring me out of my distresses...*

- a. [Psalm 25:1](#) This psalm is an acrostic poem, each verse beginning with the successive letters of the Hebrew alphabet

“When I read Psalm 25, I find myself drawn to its utter realism. If you enter into the rhythms and patterns of these verses, what you will find is probably something akin to your own life. If you are like most people, including most Christian people, then the pattern of your piety is probably something of a see-saw: there are ups and downs; good, strong seasons and

dry, weak seasons. Clearly this is the experience of this Hebrew poet, too. Just look at how the various parts of Psalm 25 are interspersed and woven together. (By the way, this sermon starter will encompass the whole Psalm, despite the Lectionary's cutting off the reading at verse 10.)

On the one hand there is lofty praise of God as the psalmist lifts his entire soul up to heaven, placing himself squarely before the throne of Yahweh in a fervent desire to praise God. **On the other hand** those words are followed by honest admissions of hardship, loneliness, and grief. Even those who lift the essence of themselves up to God are not guaranteed that they'll never have a bad day!

On the one hand there are places in this psalm in which the psalmist expresses firm desires to learn about God and live according to his divine ways only. **On the other hand** those same verses are accompanied by other passages which unstintingly confess sins past and present. The sins and follies of youth are laid out for God to see, but so are the struggles and setbacks of the psalmist's present life. The life of faith is not always a bed of roses, and we don't always come out smelling like a rose ourselves, either!

On the one hand there is in this psalm some truly soaring rhetoric on how God rewards the faithful, satisfying with good stuff those who fear God and who strive to live by the light of God's covenant. **On the other hand** it is clear that despite this belief that God gives good things to his beloved ones, nevertheless this psalmist faces the traps and snares of his enemies. Worse, this current crisis has multiplied what the psalmist describes in verse 17 as some troublesome thoughts in his heart—a passage that sounds suspiciously like how a person might describe major depression.

There is here **praise but also lament; piety but also pity; fond aspirations but also sinful failures; firm hope but also real hurt.** A description of real life does not get much more honest or realistic than this!..."

➤ https://cep.calvinseminary.edu/sermon-starters/advent-1c-2/?type=the_lectionary_psalms

Scott Hoezee

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"Some Background: A Psalm about Learning and Living

Several features of Psalm 25 indicate that it functioned in a teaching situation. It is, in other words, an *instructional* psalm (see also Psalm 1, 19, 37, 49, 73, 119, 127, 128 and others). Most obviously, it is an *alphabetical acrostic* psalm, making it easier to memorize. It goes through each of the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet in verses 1-21; verse 22 is outside the pattern and looks like an addition, shifting from "I" to "we" and thus adapting the psalm to use in the congregation.

There are other indications that the psalm was designed for teaching. It expresses an eagerness for instruction: "Make me to know" (verse 4), "teach me"(verses 4, 5), "lead me in your truth" (verse 5). The writer thinks of the Lord as a Teacher, instructing sinners (verse 8), leading and teaching the humble (verse 9), instructing believers on how to live (verse 12).

Framing the instructional core of the psalm are segments suggesting that the context for this instruction was not tranquil. The psalmist has experienced the hatred of enemies and even fears for life itself (verses 1-3, 19-20). The writer is lonely and hurting, needing forgiveness and refuge (verses 11, 16-20). In such a dire situation the psalmist prays for help and sanctuary

(verse 20) but also for *instruction* about the path that the life of a believer ought to take (verses 4, 12).

Some ABC's of Theological Instruction (verses 1-10)... *For a detailed study of the structure of this Psalm, read James Limburg's commentary at:*

➤ http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=1690

[James Limburg](#) Professor Emeritus of Old Testament, Luther Seminary, Saint Paul, Minn.

Philippians 2:1-4 (5-13) 14-18; RCL, Philippians 2:1-13 (Philippians 3:4b-14; RCL, the same reading)

Verses 5-11 are read on Passion Sunday in Lectionary Year C.

It would be difficult to find a more influential passage in all of Scripture than today's epistle reading from Philippians.

Often called "the Christ Hymn," on the supposition that Paul is quoting at least in part a very early hymn from the worship of the church, these verses have generated and shaped endless debates about the nature of Christ's humanity and divinity, his saving work, and its relationship to the Christian life. So much can be -- and has been -- said about this passage. One thing is needful. This is the drama of Christ's redemptive incursion into the depths of our bondage and despair. This is the story of God with us, told from the standpoint of his incarnation as a slave. Last week's lesson gave us a glorious picture of free citizenship in the kingdom of heaven, and of the boldness and freedom of Paul's and the Philippians' witness to the gospel.

Today we hear of Christ himself taking the form of a slave, humbling himself even to the point of death by crucifixion -- the execution reserved for slaves and traitors in the Roman Empire. Paradoxically, our liberation comes from Christ's voluntary bondage, which is his entry into our bondage. This movement by Christ is the heartbeat of the exhortation that begins and ends today's passage. If we want to become like Christ, we begin by hearing how Christ became like us, and continues to come among us. Then, and only then, are we ready to hear about "the imitation of Christ."

➤ http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=1009 [Susan Eastman](#) Assistant Professor of the practice of the Bible and Christian Formation, Duke Divinity School, Durham, NC

Christ's Example of Humility Verses 1-11

2 So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, **2** complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. **3** Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. **4** Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. **5** *Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus,*^[a] **6** *who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to*

be grasped,^[b] 7 but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant,^[c] being born in the likeness of men. 8 And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. 9 Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, 10 so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Lights in the World Verses 12-18

12 Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, 13 for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

14 Do all things without grumbling or disputing, 15 that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, 16 holding fast to the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I may be proud that I did not run in vain or labor in vain. 17 Even if I am to be poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrificial offering of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all. 18 Likewise you also should be glad and rejoice with me.

Timothy and Epaphroditus Verses 19-30

- a. [Philippians 2:5](#) Or *which was also in Christ Jesus*
- b. [Philippians 2:6](#) Or *a thing to be held on to for advantage*
- c. [Philippians 2:7](#) Or *slave* (for the contextual rendering of the Greek word *doulos*, see Preface)

The lesson begins with a series of conditional sentences, “if...then” statements. The style can be misleading. Paul is using a rhetorical device here, assuming that there certainly is encouragement in love, participation in the Spirit, and so on. One significant theological concern is how to understand the exhortations in 2:1-4. Is Paul simply offering human encouragement here: “Good, better, best, never let it rest until your good is better and your better is best?” At first glance Paul seems to be exhorting: continue to have fellowship, love, affection, and sympathy. Yet the statements are theologically grounded in something other than a simple striving for self-improvement or an effort to develop one’s human potential. The exhortations are grounded in the example and activity of Christ, “who emptied himself, taking the form of a servant” (2:7). Therefore, the preacher would be wise to include these verses in

the text for the day. These exhortations and conditional statements are not offered as anew legalism for the people of God. They remain rooted and grounded in Christ. Even if Paul were speaking primarily of the mutual love, fellowship, sympathy, and affection of Christians, we would assert that the motivation for these actions derives and issues from the Spirit's activity in us. Christ is both the ground and the example for our manner of life..."

- http://wordandworld.luthersem.edu/content/pdfs/7-4_Baptized/7-4_Debner.pdf
Wendell R. Debner Luther Northwestern Theological Seminary, St. Paul, Minnesota

Matthew 21:23-27 (28-32); RCL, Matthew 21:23-32
(Matthew 21:33-46; RCL, the same reading)

"A while back I heard an old Jewish witticism in which someone asks his rabbi, "Why do rabbis always answer a question with another question?" to which the rabbi replied, "Why shouldn't a rabbi answer a question with another question?"

So also in Matthew 21: Jesus side-steps the question of the Pharisees as to the source of his authority by asking them a related question about John the Baptist. Jesus and John were not only cousins but they were also similar in that each had appeared from out of nowhere and performed a ministry that meant a great deal to a lot of people. So Jesus says, "Let's back up one step to my predecessor John: if you can tell me where his authority came from, then I'll tell you where mine comes from."

Jesus asks this knowing full well that the answer to both questions was the same. Neither John nor Jesus had any human authority. Neither had gone to seminary, neither had been licensed or ordained. If either John or Jesus had any true authority to claim, it had to be from God directly...

Even at that, however, Jesus doesn't drop the conversation. He goes on with a little parable. We have one father and two sons. When the father orders the one son to go to work, he replies..."

- https://cep.calvinseminary.edu/sermon-starters/proper-21a/?type=the_lectionary_gospel
Scott Hoezee

"The Holy Gospel beginning in the 21st Chapter of St. Matthew"

The Triumphal Entry Verses 1-11

Jesus Cleanses the Temple Verses 12-17

Jesus Curses the Fig Tree Verses 18-22

The Authority of Jesus Challenged Verses 23-27

²³ And when he 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 gave you this

authority?”²⁴ Jesus answered them, **“I also will ask you one question, and if you tell me the answer, then I also will tell you by what authority I do these things.”**²⁵ **The baptism of John, from where did it come? From heaven or from man?”** And they discussed it among themselves, saying, “If we say, ‘From heaven,’ he will say to us, ‘Why then did you not believe him?’²⁶ But if we say, ‘From man,’ we are afraid of the crowd, for they all hold that John was a prophet.”²⁷ So they answered Jesus, “We do not know.” And he said to them, **“Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things.”**

The Parable of the Two Sons Verses 28-32 (optional)

²⁸ “What do you think? A man had two sons. And he went to the first and said, ‘Son, go and work in the vineyard today.’²⁹ And he answered, ‘I will not,’ but afterward he changed his mind and went.³⁰ And he went to the other son and said the same. And he answered, ‘I go, sir,’ but did not go.³¹ Which of the two did the will of his father?” They said, **“The first.”** Jesus said to them, **“Truly, I say to you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes go into the kingdom of God before you.³² 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 when you saw it, you did not afterward change your minds and believe him.”**

The Parable of the Tenants Verses 33-46 (Proper 26)

- a. [Matthew 21:34](#) Or *bondservants*; also verses [35](#), [36](#)
- b. [Matthew 21:42](#) Greek *the head of the corner*

“This is the Gospel of the Lord” **“Praise to You, O Christ”**

“Matthew highlights Jesus’ authority as a central, albeit contested issue throughout the Gospel (for example, Matthew 7:28-29, 9:32-34, 12:24, 28:18).¹

Matthew is not content, however, with the simple claim that Jesus possesses divine power, nor even that his power surpasses that of worldly leaders. Matthew focuses instead on the nature, source, and consequences of Jesus’ power. He aims to demonstrate not only that Jesus is more powerful than the world’s powers, but that his power is of a different kind, a power that produces healing and reconciliation rather than alienation and violence. From the moment of Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem, Matthew focuses ever more insistently on the assertion, demonstration, defense, and finally the affirmation, via the cross and resurrection, of Jesus’ authority.

The story of Jesus' initial encounter with the most powerful leaders in Jerusalem follows soon after Jesus' triumphal entry and his cleansing and occupation of the temple. As the second day of Jesus' occupation begins, the various groups that oppose Jesus inaugurate a series of five challenges (Matthew 21:23-32, 22:15-22, 22:23-33, 22:34-40, and 22:41-46), all of which aim at undermining his authority, in order to dislodge him from the temple. Although we customarily break the story that begins in Matthew 21:23 into discrete units, this first challenge does not formally end until 22:14, making this by far the longest single controversy/challenge story in the Gospel. These stories are all "zero-sum" contests in which the winner gains honor—and power—at the loser's expense. If Jesus were to lose any of these challenges, his occupation of the temple would cease, his challenge to the authorities in Jerusalem would end, and the leaders would regain control of the temple. If they win any of these challenges, there is no need to crucify him.

- https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=4575 [Stanley Saunders](#)
Associate Professor of New Testament, Columbia Theological Seminary, Atlanta, Ga.

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"The priests and the elders of the Jews questioned Jesus as to on what authority he was doing all these things. Instead of giving an answer Jesus asked them a question which they did not want to answer. In that context Jesus told them the parable of two sons... Then he told the priests and the Pharisees that the prostitutes and the tax collectors would enter the kingdom of God ahead of them.

The meaning of this story is crystal clear. The first son stands for the tax collectors and sinners. Their lifestyle looked like a blunt refusal to have anything to do with religion or God; and yet when Jesus came they listened to him and changed their way of life to fit to His message and meet his demands. The second son stands for the priests, scribes, and Pharisees. They had only one profession in their lives that they would serve God and obey his commandments; and yet when the Son of God came they completely ignored Him and in the end they crucified Him.

This parable brings out a profound truth that words can never take the place of deeds. There is a difference in the way the two sons responded to their father's request. The first son answers with almost contemptuous bluntness. On the other hand the second son says all things with great respect and politeness and he even adds "sir" at the end of every sentence. But neither the verbal courtesy, nor the politeness could take the place of deeds. It is true that only through deeds we can prove that we really love someone.

The earliest name for Christianity was "The Way" as it is mentioned in the book of Acts (9:2). It was never simply learning catechism on the faith or reciting certain creeds but it was a way of life shown by deeds, which proved the loyalty to the faith. Dedicated members of early Christianity were ready even to sacrifice their own lives to prove their loyalty to and love for Christ. The two sons in the parable symbolically represent two different kinds of people. There have always been people whose words said one thing and their lives showed something else... The greatest liability the church has is the unsatisfactory lives of professing Christians. It is true that our everyday lives either attract or repel people from Christianity. Once a young man said to a great Christian preacher who used to teach finest things but did not live them, " I cannot hear what you say for listening to what you are". If one does not practice what one teaches, no matter, whether he is clergy or layman, will do infinite harm to Christ and his church...

When we do an objective evaluation of both of those young people of the parable, we naturally come to the conclusion that neither one of them is ideal. Everyone of us would say that the first son is better than the second. But neither one was perfect. The first son would have been a perfect man if he could say "yes" to his father with courage and then go and do the work in the vineyard with fidelity. But both sons in the parable hurt their father's heart. A perfect son brings joy to his father and that son always will be listening to his father's requests and gladly obeying them..."

- http://www.malankaraworld.com/Library/Sermons/Sermons_1st-sunday-after-transfiguration-DT.htm A service of St. Basil's Syriac Orthodox Church, Ohio

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"Having baffled the authorities by confronting them with the issue of John's authority, Jesus, in Mark, continues the defence by recounting the parable of the labourers in the vineyard who kill the owner's beloved Son (12:1-12). Matthew will also include this as part of the response of Jesus, but on either side of it he includes two new parables. Jesus' response now consists of three parables. The first speaks about people's response to John. It is the rest of today's reading (21:28-32). The second speaks of people's response to Jesus (21:33-46), as in Mark (12:1-12). The third speaks of people's response to the disciples and their mission (22:1-14). These latter will be the readings for the next two Sundays.

The first parable has a simple structure: 2 sons whose expression of willingness or unwillingness to work in the vineyard is reversed in practice. As in the next parable the vineyard is a standard image of Israel. The chief priest and elders are set in contrast to the prostitutes and tax collectors. The former engage in the rhetoric of obedience, but fail to do God's will. The latter disqualify themselves, but then turn to God. Note that all this is in response to the ministry of John the Baptist. For Matthew, of course, already John proclaimed the kingdom of God (3:2) in the same terms as Jesus (4:17) and the disciples (10:7). Indeed, as it says in 21:32, John came 'in the way of righteousness', another of Matthew's key terms, beside 'kingdom of God' (21:31). These are the terms that embrace the beatitudes (5:3,6,10).

Matthew has a way of cutting through the red tape and of by-passing the religious bureaucracy. There is no room for pretence or pretentiousness. The prostitutes and toll collectors, the lousy rich and the women they exploited, got the point, at least some of them. Is it because they allowed themselves to be vulnerable, to be moved, to let the word of compelling compassion address their deeper needs? Were the religious leaders so defensive in protecting their system - in the name of the people of God and the Scripture - that they suppressed their inner cries, stopped their ears? It is odd that we still find so many people inside the church who have a greater problem moving with compassion for change in society than many outside the church..."

- <http://wwwstaff.murdoch.edu.au/~loader/MtPentecost16.htm> Revd Emeritus Professor Dr William Ronald George Loader, Emeritus Professor of New Testament, Murdoch University, Perth, Australia



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The Matthew Challenge

Have three hours, nine minutes and 20 seconds before November 29?

That's how long it will take to listen to this online audio recording of Matthew in the King James translation. Follow along in your favorite translation and note the different choices the translators make.

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nl60uq6H3ZM> Greatest Audio Books

Weekly review thoughts



“The story is told among Jews of a rabbi who always signed his letters with the words, “From one who is truly humble.” One day someone asked how a humble person could ever say such a thing about himself. A friend of the rabbi’s replied that the rabbi had in fact become so humble that he no longer even realized it was a virtue—it had simply become his life. Describing himself as humble seemed to him as innocent as saying he had brown eyes.

“If Jesus means anything to you, if his Spirit is in you and his compassion occupies even the smallest corner of your heart, then make humility your life,” Paul writes. Let that central movement of God in salvation—the move away from power and toward humble service—become so much a part of your life as to be nearly a reflex.”

- https://cep.calvinseminary.edu/sermon-starters/proper-21a/?type=lectionary_epistle

Scott Hozzee