



Sunday 27th September 2026

Seventeenth Sunday after Trinity

Gospel Reading

Matthew 21.23-32

When he 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.

Parable of the Two Sons

'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.

Other Readings: Ezekiel 18.1-4.25-end

Psalms 25.1-8

Philippians 2.1-13

Homily

Saint Augustine said, 'Love God and do what you like.'

In this passage from Matthew's gospel we have the question of Jesus' authority and two brothers who do what they like.

In the first part of the reading, we are presented with chief priests and elders who have power, but not the kind of authority that Jesus and John had. They see their power being challenged. It relies on people understanding the order of things, the way things have always been. A wild man living in the wild place beyond the city shouldn't have power and authority but the people love him. He seems authentic and he gives them a sense of agency and empowerment. He offers them a new start and a hope for the future. The more you have to repent, the better you might feel afterwards so tax collectors and prostitutes are especially keen.

This incident occurs in Matthew's gospel almost immediately after what we call Palm Sunday. We know that Jesus has only a few days left to live and he has caused a great sensation by arriving in Jerusalem on a donkey reminding people of the stories and prophecies they have grown up with. Matthew tells us the city was in turmoil. His next

public action is to cleanse the temple of money changers and swindlers. More powerful people with no authority being displaced.

So when we meet Jesus in this morning's reading, he is being questioned. How dare he? Who does he think he is?

Jesus loves the people. He loves the chief priest and the elders too, he wants them to see and understand what the tax collectors and the prostitutes see. He wants them to change their minds and love God. But alas, they seem to love power more. And so we have our parable of the two sons.

And this is where the quote from St Augustine comes in. Preached in his homily on Easter Day 407 AD, St Augustine taught is to love God and do what we like. If we love someone, we will love to do the things that please them. We will find joy in giving joy to others. Doing what we like, pleasing ourselves, when our life is orientated towards God and the love shown to humanity in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, means whatever *we* like is going to be what *God* likes too. This isn't permission to be selfish. This is a self-demonstrating love in action. If doing what we like causes harm to others, then we don't really love God.

The two brothers do what they like. One avoids upsetting his dad in the moment by saying he will do something when he knows he won't. The other one, upsets dad by telling him he's not going to cooperate, but later changes his mind and does what his dad has asked him to do in the first place. The son who changes his mind is the one who pleases dad. Actions mean more than words.

Jesus' authority comes from love. The people who meet him know he loves them. The ones who try to destroy him, don't recognise this, they only see someone challenging their power. Power and authority are not the same.

And what does Jesus mean when he says the tax collectors and prostitutes are going into the kingdom of God ahead of the chief priests and elders? This isn't a statement about what happens when you die. This is a promise of what can happen to make you even more alive.

The Kingdom is not so much a place as a state of being, a way of looking at the world.

Finding God where you are and believing that you are loved and redeemed and that the people you encounter are also beloved children of God. To have this understanding is to love God and do what you like because you can only demonstrate love towards others when you know we are all God's children.

668 words

Conversation Questions

1. What do you make of St Augustine's advice to love God and do what you like?
2. In the parable of the two sons, who do you most strongly identify with?
3. How easy is it for you to change your mind? Is it easier to change your mind about an idea or a person? One of the things that can hold us back from fulfilling our potential is other people not willing to believe we have changed or can change. How can we support and encourage each other when we want to make changes in our lives?
4. Is there anything else from the passage not already discussed that speaks to you? What is it?
5. What will you do this week in your Monday-to-Saturday ministry in response to what you have heard today? #everydayfaith

Prayer

Spend some time in prayer, responding to what you have heard today and listening to what God might be saying to you.

Collect of the day

*Eternal Father,
whose Son Jesus Christ ascended to the throne of heaven
that he might rule over all things as Lord and King:
keep the Church in the unity of the Spirit
and in the bond of peace,
and bring the whole created order to worship at his feet;
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.*

(or)

*God the Father,
help us to hear the call of Christ the King
and to follow in his service,
whose kingdom has no end;
for he reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, one glory.*

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