

WHAT DO WE BELIEVE AND HOW DO WE RESPOND?

MATTHEW 21:23-32 AND PHILIPPIANS 2:1-13

Philippians 2:1-13

Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.

In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:

Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.

And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death — even death on a cross!

Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfil his good purpose.

Matthew 21:23-32

Jesus entered the temple courts, and, while he was teaching, the chief priests and the elders of the people came to him. “By what authority are you doing these things?” they asked. “And who gave you this authority?”

Jesus replied, “I will also ask you one question. If you answer me, I will tell you by what authority I am doing these things. John’s baptism—where did it come from? Was it from heaven, or of human origin?”

They discussed it among themselves and said, “If we say, ‘From heaven,’ he will ask, ‘Then why didn’t you believe him?’ But if we say, ‘Of human origin’—we are afraid of the people, for they all hold that John was a prophet.” So they answered Jesus, “We don’t know.”

Then he said, “Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things.

“What do you think? There was a man who had two sons. He went to the first and said, ‘Son, go and work today in the vineyard.’ “‘I will not,’ he answered, but later he changed his mind and went. “Then the father went to the other son and said the same thing. He answered, ‘I will, sir,’ but he did not go.

“Which of the two did what his father wanted?” “The first,” they answered.

Jesus said to them, “Truly I tell you; the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you. For John came to you to show you the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes did. And even after you saw this, you did not repent and believe him.

REFLECTION

In today’s Gospel reading the religious leaders, the chief priests and the elders, tried to ask Jesus a trick question about his authority. They had hoped to make a fool out of Jesus. The only problem was that their question became a boomerang when Jesus met their challenging question with a question of His own. When Jesus asked them His question it was clear that whatever way they answered the question would be incriminating.

The challenge for us in today’s Gospel is ‘do our words match our actions when it comes to obedience to the will of God?’ It is both our actions and our words that show what we truly believe.

Everything that we do says something about who we are and what we believe. Right after the chief priests and the elders refused to answer Jesus’ question, Jesus told them a parable about two sons. A father of two sons bids them to go to work in his vineyard. The first one said no and then later changed his mind and went. The second one said yes, but refused to go and work. So when Jesus asked them which son did the will of their father, they naturally answered the first. It was then that Jesus told them, the chief priests and the elders, that there were sinners who were going ahead of them in to the kingdom of God. Jesus was pointing out to them that they were like the second son in the parable who said that he would go and did not live up to his word.

So what do we believe? What do we believe as Christians?

Christians throughout the world profess our faith in the words of the Nicene Creed. (Have you ever thought about Christians in other countries and what they believe?) This is what we say we believe as Christians. Now if we truly believe this, then we should live our lives to reflect this.

THE NICENE CREED

**We believe in one God,
the Father, the Almighty,
maker of heaven and earth,
of all that is, seen and unseen.**

**We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ,
the only Son of God,
eternally begotten of the Father,
God from God, Light from Light,
true God from true God,
begotten, not made,
of one being with the Father;
through him all things are made.
For us and our salvation he came down from heaven,
was incarnate from the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary
and was made man.
For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate;
he suffered death and was buried.
On the third day he rose again
in accordance with the Scriptures;
he ascended into heaven
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead,
and his kingdom will have no end.**

**We believe in the Holy Spirit,
the Lord, the giver of life,
who proceeds from the Father and the Son,
who with the Father and the Son is worshipped and glorified,
who has spoken through the prophets.
We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church.
We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.
We look for the resurrection of the dead,
and the life of the world to come. Amen.**

Notice how it is set out – 3 sections or paragraphs – one for each member of the Trinity.

Let's look at each line – do you understand it? Do you agree with it?

In today's Gospel reading the Chief priests and elders were not fruitful, they were not active in service. They were in positions where they could have made a significant impact upon the world that they lived in, but they were so ineffective. It seems like they just enjoyed being in charge of religious matters, so Jesus and His views were a threat to their way of doing things. They seemed to exhibit a behaviour that acknowledged God and their obedience to God. Yet, their actions didn't match their words.

The chief priests and the elders would more than likely be the kind of people that Jesus was talking about when He said, 'It is not anyone who says to me,

'Lord, Lord,' who will enter the kingdom of Heaven, but the person who does the will of my Father in heaven. (Matthew 7:21).

It is God's will that we work and be fruitful in His kingdom. In order for us to be fruitful we must have faith that acts and brings forth fruit because "faith without works is dead" (James 2:26).

You might think that you are not in a significant position and that you cannot have a much of an impact on the world, but you would be wrong. God has placed you where he wants you to be. He has given you relationships with all kinds of people, neighbours, family, friends, work colleagues, your local shopkeeper or postman. God has asked us to love him and to love our neighbour. If we do that then we will have a significant effect our own neighbourhood and the world.

Just look at the effect that the coronavirus pandemic is having on the world, and on our communities. Horror, fear, greed. People living in fear of catching the virus, or losing their job, or their home. People stockpiling food and toilet rolls in case there is another lockdown. Imagine how much better the world would be if we all loved God and loved our neighbour. Are you ready to go out into your neighbourhood and share God's love by living out your faith?

In Paul's letter to the Philippians Paul writes: '...if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others'.

How can we do that?

If you are unable to collect the shopping for someone who is isolating, could you give them a phone call to cheer them up and remind them that they are not forgotten? Or maybe write them a card or letter? There are many ways that we can help others.

I believe in God. I believe in you...you are the church...you are the hands and feet that God can use today to share his love with our community.

What do you believe? How are you going to respond?

Let us pray...