

By What Authority?

A World Communion Meditation presented by The Rev. Philip A. Rodgers presented Sunday, October 1st, 2017
at Trinity United Church in Malton, related to Matthew 21: 23-32

It is no secret that Jesus had a huge problem with the Pharisees, who didn't think that they needed a change of heart. They believed they were just fine the way they were and that they were appropriately religious and they knew it, so it is no surprise that they questioned his authority to speak about the will of their God...and that's the way it has always been.

In the Old Testament, the time of Christ and throughout all of church history, it's always the same. God's people, we, have consistently been blind to our own need to have a change of heart and a change of mind about doing God's work in the messed up world around us. And so in this parable for today, Jesus is inviting you and me to change...you and I need a change of mind and heart, about the messed up world around us. You and I need a change of heart about the painful needs of hurting people around us...we need a change of mind about actually doing God's work of love in a messed up world. We all need this change of heart, a change inside our mind and spirit.

Let's say you help as a volunteer organizing field trips for school children, or as a soccer mom for the local team, or on a committee at the church. And let's say that this soccer mom volunteers and says, "Yes, I will telephone all the parents and tell them about the change of time of the next game." But she doesn't do it, and nobody shows up because no one was called. Doesn't that drive you up the wall?

Or let's say, just saying now, that you are a computer programmer, and the programmer at the cubicle next to you says, "Yes, I can get that work done tonight," and you come into the office in the morning and it isn't done. You can't say anything, so you bite your lips and shake your head in disgust and you do the work. It's aggravating when people make promises but don't follow through on them.

Since we all have had similar reactions and feelings, it is easy for us to understand the parable of Jesus for today about the two defiant bad boys. Just saying now...the meaning is so obvious! The one son was all talk and didn't walk the walk, while the other said he wasn't going to do what he was asked and did it. The parable simply begs us to examine which bad boy/girl are we.

Jesus' parables are like One Act Plays with the spotlight on the last personality on the stage. That is where the focus is. I am always amazed at the spiritual profundity of Jesus' stories: so brilliant, so perceptive, so right on. Jesus' stories seem to reveal the very mind and heart of God. The father said to one son, "Would you go and work in my vineyard today?" and the son said, "Yes, yes, I'll go right away" - but didn't do it. So the father said to the second son, "Will you go and work in my vineyard today?" and the second son said "No, I've got other things going on right now," but he had a change of heart and went and did what the father requested. "Now, which of the two did the will of the father?" This is not rocket science, you know. And the answer was *and still is* obvious.

"By what authority do you speak as you do, Jesus?" the all-knowing, arrogant combative Pharisees asked. It's a good question. The answer is found inside the parable of those two bad boys: one who talked the talk and nothing else - the other who walked the walk and did the will of his father. The church used to speak with authority but it has forgotten where authority comes from. Authority comes first from common sense - authority comes through authenticity - authority comes through integrity - authority comes through congruency, when our actions match our words.

This is the gospel of Jesus Christ. Amen.