

Old Testament: Proverbs 18:21
New Testament: James 1:19, 2:18 & 3:5
Gospel Reading: Matthew 21: 28 - 32

Please pray with me. And now Lord God may the words of my mouth, and the meditations of all our hearts, be pleasing and acceptable in Thy sight our Rock and our Redeemer, Amen.

The truth is that our mouths can get us in an awful lot of trouble both by what is said and by what is unsaid. And now in 2025, and beyond, our fingers, typing into a keyboard, can also get us in a lot of trouble. This is precisely because our mouth can talk a real big game without having any real way to back up what we talk about. This is especially dangerous in the Church when Christians either 1) talk a big game about Jesus being in their hearts, about being saved, but then have no fruit, no actionable evidence, of said love of Jesus, no discipleship; or 2) use Christianity, Jesus, and the Bible as a cover for their own ideas and agendas, which is blasphemous, taking God's name in vain, thereby "witnessing" to a false Christianity confusing and disorienting fellow Christians and non-Christians alike. When these things happen our faith rings hollow as does our witness. In order to carry out the commission of Jesus to go and make disciples of all nations, our witness cannot be hollow. And we certainly cannot coerce people into discipleship through threat and intimidation. If you disagree please point out to me in scripture when Jesus conscripts people into his "army" of disciples. Time and again Jesus displays that the Kingdom of God is not a kingdom built on speeches or influencers, a whole lot of hollow words or coercion. No, the Kingdom of God is a kingdom built on people living into the love, grace, mercy, justice, and equity of God.

Let's set the context for our reading. Just before he tells us the parable of the two sons, Jesus is confronted in the temple by the chief priests and the elders. And they want to know by what authority Jesus is doing all the amazing things he has been doing and who gave him this authority. Now, the chief priests and elders would lean more into our first group discussed above. They were far more concerned about ritual cleanliness and ritual purity than they were about loving God and loving their neighbor, both of which are found in the Torah (Deuteronomy and Leviticus respectively). This ritualistic cleanliness is the modern day equivalent of having Jesus in your heart without discipleship. So long as you maintain the appearance, or the verbal appearance, of being ritually clean and pure then that is good enough. The chief priests and elders were failing, in their witness, to live into the Kingdom of God. The authority question is asked because, once again, they are far too reliant on the big talk of cleanliness and purity. The authority question is further asked because it is a valid question. Where does someone's authority come from? Does it come from our

own mouth? I claim I have authority over something so I do? Does it come from education? Does it come from intelligence? Does it come from other people? Does it come from a lifetime of experience? Though Jesus never does directly answer the question about by what authority he is doing the things that he is doing, he does offer this parable for us to consider how authority functions in the Kingdom of God.

Jesus depicts God as a man with two sons. God always wants all of God's children to *do* God's will. Right? What God wants is obedience in action and just in word alone. We confess, we repent, we accept grace, and then we live lives of love and service like Jesus did. And so, in this parable, God asks the one son to go and do his will, work in the vineyard today. Though the son at first *says* "no thanks", he comes to recognize that it is important to not simply tell his buddies how great his dad is, but to show them by *doing* his will. Now the other son comes along and is also told by his father to do his will, go work in the vineyard. And this *says* "Great, I'll get right on that!" but ends up disrespecting his Father by not going and doing his will. Jesus then asks the chief priests and elders which son did the will of his father and they all know the answer. The one who actually did something! The one who went and actually *did* the will of the father instead of just talking about it. They call themselves out without even realizing that they have done so. Which points to the truth and the reality that we all *know* that faith and Christianity is about much more than just mere words. We all *know* that faith and Christianity is about doing the most good for the most people. The difference is between the people who are willing, and unwilling, to do the work of the Kingdom of God. Who is actually willing to confess, repent, accept grace, and then live lives of love and service like Jesus did? Who is actually living into the love, grace, mercy, justice, and equity of God? This is what Jesus did; he lived out what he talked and preached about. And there were earthly consequences! Positive consequences were that marginalized people were seen, loved, and cared for; equity was pursued on their behalf. Negative consequences were that those with power and influence felt threatened by such equity and killed him. We see that Jesus' actions are where he got his authority from. And we further lean into our preaching theme of "fear not beloved child" if we feel threatened to become overwhelmed by the negative consequences.

Perhaps this Lenten season can be an opportunity for you to re-examine to whom you give authority and why. Maybe you need to re-examine your reasons for giving authority and question whether or not people who talk a good game have your respect or people who do the most good for the most people have your respect. And let us always remember that in all things, be they word or deed, may God be honored and praised. Amen.