

**Sheffield United Reformed Churches
Team Ministry worship for individuals or families
Sunday 27th September 2020 at 10:30 am.**

17th Sunday after Pentecost

Call to Worship

I was glad when they said to me, 'Let us go to the house of the Lord '

Hymn - R&S 538

Teach me, my God and King, in all things Thee to see,
and what I do in anything, to do it as for Thee.

To scorn the senses' sway, while still to Thee I tend;
in all I do be Thou the Way, in all be Thou the End.

All may of Thee partake; nothing so small can be,
but draws, when acted for Thy sake, greatness and worth from Thee.

If done t'obey Thy laws, e'en servile labors shine;
hallowed is toil, if this the cause, the meanest work divine.

Prayers of Praise, Thanksgiving and Confession

Heavenly Father, we are gathered here in your presence to worship your holy name. We are in many places but we have this one purpose.

You know us. You know the way we think and have seen the ways we behave. You have seen our lack of love to others and our habit of being selective with our friendships. You know that we often forget you and have nothing to offer you.

When we have a good day we recall the gifts you have bestowed on us and the joy these can bring when we use them as you have intended. Our life is often unbalanced because we forget its real purpose and seek popularity at the expense of service.

Father, through Your Holy Spirit, strengthen the right spirit within us this morning as we worship that whoever calls upon the name of the Lord will be forgiven, reinvigorated and have renewed confidence in Your gifts to us, that we will make their exercise a priority.

The Lord's Prayer



Readings

Exodus 17: 1-7 - Moses strikes water from a rock at Meribah... (see picture right)

Matthew 21: 23-32 - Authority means the courage of your convictions and action!

Philippians 2: 1-13 - Following Christ's example of humble service, we must work out our salvation - because God works in us!

Reflection - by Rev Pete Clark

Has it ever occurred to you that Matthew's Gospel is a bit like Mastermind without the chair? Questions, questions, questions. I think it was Voltaire who suggested we should judge someone, not by his questions but by his answers. As a way of telling people who Jesus was and the values He embraces Matthew uses a question/answer dialogue.

If we think about it a little more:-

John and Pilate ask questions about who Jesus is 'Are you the One who is to come?' and 'Are you the King of the Jews?'

The religious and political leaders of the day ask a whole range of questions about such things as breaking tradition, working on the Sabbath, signs and proof, divorce, taxes and authority.

The disciples add theirs with questions about who is the greatest, eternal life.

Peter asked questions about forgiveness and about what their reward would be after leaving everything to follow Jesus.

These questions are all revealing. With the exception of John and perhaps (ironically) Pilate, the questions are all self-serving. Those who ask Jesus questions want to trap him, or impress him, or get something from him. And to every pointed question Jesus offers an equally pointed answer, which reveals truth about the Kingdom, the King, and the Kingdom's subjects.

Here in Matthew 21 Jesus responds to the question put to him with a question of his own, and a parable to illustrate it. It is a real game of cat and mouse.

The chief priests and elders ask Jesus where His authority comes from. His return-question is about John the Baptist. He asks them if John's baptism came from heaven, or from man? His question reverses the trap which the chief priests and elders are trying to set for Jesus. His accusers take what the Americans call the Fifth Amendment. They say nothing, refusing to answer Jesus lest it incriminate them in the eyes of the crowds. So Jesus, in turn, doesn't answer their question about his authority either, but he does tell them a parable.

The parable sets up a comparison of two sons. One who says he will do what his father asks, but doesn't, with one who says he won't, but does. For every individual who hears this parable the comparison helps them (forces them) to ask the question, *Which am I?* Am I the son who presents himself as obedient while running around raising havoc, or am I the daughter who to all appearances is the "black sheep" but in the end does what is needed? Which am I? Which are you?

There is an accusation in the parable -- some who claim to obey the Father and observe the requirements of the Law fail, in actuality, to do so. Is this who we are, as believers -- as pastors, teachers, church council members and Sunday school teachers? Which am I? Which are you?

Jesus returns, after telling this comparative parable, to John. He returns accusation for accusation, "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." The one whose voice cried out in the wilderness, who was sent to prepare the way of the Lord, preaching repentance; went un-recognized and un-believed. The elders and leaders did not change their mind, Jesus tells us, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes did. Which am I? Which will you be?

We may not be the chief priests and elders of Jesus' day, asking the Messiah accusing questions. Still, the parable may speak volumes to us. When heard by the individual, as one tries to make sense of Jesus' parable for oneself and apply it to one's own life, it has the ring of Romans 7:19; it may be a question of the good that we would do but don't (or can't) and the evil we don't want to do, but still....

Jesus' parable is, in the end, a challenge. It asks us how we will respond to the truth of the gospel - will we change our mind and believe, or not? Will we be the daughter who pretends obedience or the son who turns around and changes his mind?

Recall the words of a pop song which we all ignored because it was not around in the 60's

I can't remember who sang it and when it appeared and it was probably never written with any religious intent, but it seems to tie in with this dialogue (see below).

Jesus' question, and the answer he points us to in the parable of the two sons, pushes us to the point of reflection and decision. Which will we be? Which can we be? Will we change our mind, and believe and do?

Song for Reflection - *Change your mind* by Sister Hazel

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=71KdkbT7FKA>

*Hey, Hey! Did you ever think there might be another way
To just feel better, just feel better about today?*

*Oh no- If you never want to have to turn and go away
You might feel better, might feel better if you stay*

*Yeah yeah - I bet you haven't heard a word I've said
Yeah yeah - If you've had enough of all your tryin'
Just give up the state of mind you're in:*

*If you want to be somebody else,
If you're tired of fighting battles with yourself
If you want to be somebody else*

Change your mind...

*Hey hey - Have you ever danced in the rain
Or thanked the sun just for shining- just for shining over the sea?
Oh no- take it all in the world's a show
And yeah, you look much better, Look much better when you glow*

*Hey hey - what ya say we both go and seize the day?
'cause what's your hurry, what's your hurry anyway?*

Hymn - R&S 474

Brother, sister, let me serve you; let me be as Christ to you;
pray that I may have the grace to let you be my servant too.

We are pilgrims on a journey, and companions on the road;
we are here to help each other walk the mile and bear the load.

I will hold the Christ-light for you in the night-time of your fear;
I will hold my hand out to you, speak the peace you long to hear.

I will weep when you are weeping; when you laugh I'll laugh with you;
I will share your joy and sorrow, till we've seen this journey through.

When we sing to God in heaven, we shall find such harmony,
born of all we've known together of Christ's love and agony.

Prayers of Intercession

We pray for our nation at this current time:-

For people who are unable to work

Those in lockdown

Those with COVID - 19

Those who are isolated by the rules

Those whose normal activities are cancelled condemning them to social isolation.

For those who have lost their jobs

For children returning to school and those going to school for the first time

For those going to University for the first time and for the staff

For the Community organisations whose future has become uncertain.

For Churches still unable to hold services

For those with responsibility to lead the country

For those whose physical and mental health has suffered

Father we are a nation in distress. Confused, alarmed frightened. Help us to trust the comfort we will find in you as we answer the question, 'Which am I'?

Hymn - R&S 261

At the name of Jesus every knee shall bow, every tongue confess him King of glory now.

'Tis the Father's pleasure we should call him Lord, who from the beginning was the mighty Word.

Humbled for a season to receive a name from the lips of sinners unto whom he came,
faithfully he bore it spotless to the last, brought it back victorious, when from death he passed.

In your hearts enthrone him; there let him subdue all that is not holy, all that is not true;
crown him as your Captain in temptation's hour: let his will enfold you in its light and power.

Benediction

When you walk through a storm hold your head up high and don't be afraid of the dark.

At the end of the storm is a golden sky and the sweet silver song of a lark.

Walk on through the wind, walk on through the rain, tho' your dreams be tossed and blown.

Walk on, walk on, with hope in your heart

And you'll never walk alone - You'll never walk alone.

The Blessing of God Almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit be upon us and remain with us always.
Amen