

Coop's Scoops # 107 Sunday Liturgy and Sermon , September 27th 2020



Sentence: My Sheep hear my voice, says the Lord; I know them and they follow me. John 10:27

Collect: Grant, O merciful God, that your Church, being gathered by your Holy Spirit into one, may show forth your power among all peoples, to the glory of your name; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

Readings: Exodus 33: 12-23 Psalm 99 Phillipians 2: 1-13

The Holy Gospel: Matthew 21: 23-32

²³When 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?" ²⁴Jesus 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. ²⁵Did 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?' ²⁶But if we say, 'Of human origin,' we are afraid of the crowd; for all regard John as a prophet." ²⁷So 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.

²⁸"What do you think? A man had two sons; he went to the first and said, 'Son, go and work in the vineyard today.' ²⁹He answered, 'I will not'; but later he changed

his mind and went. ³⁰The father went to the second and said the same; and he answered, 'I go, sir'; but he did not go. ³¹Which 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. ³²For 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.

Sermon:

Walking together through the parable of the two sons this morning may lead us to very new ways of thinking. So let's get started on this adventure!

The Scribes and Pharisees had much reason to be wary of Jesus when they came to question him that day. Just the week before He had entered the Temple, not to take His place as a reader, or to teach a lesson, but rather to overturn the money tables, and fling a whip around, and insist that the Temple cease to be a place of commerce but rather a house of prayer. When they asked by whose authority He did these things, the Scribes and Pharisees were really asking something like "Who are you to tell US how to run the Temple and protect the Torah and traditions?" And they weren't really wanting to know, they were just plain miffed that so many people were following Jesus, who seemed to be dismantling all they had worked for all their lives.

We have to remember that these Scribes and Pharisees were the "good" people...the ones who watched over the doctrine and practice of the faith of the Jewish people. They were not



intent on evil, but intent on ensuring good. Yet Jesus tells them, after the little sparring match of wits over the question of John the Baptist, that the scandalous people will be entering the Kingdom ahead of them. That's an echo of the "first

shall be last, and the last shall be first”. And the reason that they will be first is actually the whole point of the parable.

The first son, the one who told his father he would not help with the work, represents the tax collectors and sins. The “lowest of the low” in Jerusalem began by saying ‘no’ to the commandments and the teachings and the Law. But when John came, and pronounced that the Kingdom of Heaven had come near, they changed their minds, and changed their directions and were baptized as a symbol of their repentance. They must have been radically changed in heart and mind and practice, because more and more people, seeing the change in them, came also to be baptized by John and begin a new way of life. So, though they had begun in disobedience, they in fact did go to do what God had called them to do.

And what was that? What **was** the work of God that they should do? We find several references to help us know. In John 6:29 we read that “**God’s work is to believe in the One whom He sent**”. In John 6:40, again we read “ **And this is the will of Him who sent Me**, that everyone who sees the Son and **believes in Him** may have everlasting life and I will raise him up at the last day.” In the Kingdom of God then bursting in upon the world, the work and will of God was **not** to specific **actions** but rather to **faith**; not to Law but to grace; not to put new truth/wine in old wineskins, but rather **to believe** in the One whom God had sent. Namely Jesus.

And so the Pharisees and scribes were like the second Son, who had for centuries said “ **I go, Sir**” and yet when Jesus came, they did not believe and did not receive, and that is their failure to do the work of God. The Scribes and Pharisees, by not believing in the One whom God had sent, were not entering in to the Kingdom. Not yet. They were lagging behind others who were running to get in.

And so, when Jesus asks “Who did the will of the Father”, the answer is Son One: meaning the tax collectors and sinners who first said no and then flocked to John and **believed** what John told them about Jesus. That is why they are going quickly into the Kingdom of God on earth ahead of Scribes and Pharisees. Not going in instead of the Scribes and Pharisees...there was still much time for conviction and belief...but going in ahead of them. And the Scribes and Pharisees are standing by heavy-footed, so full of themselves that they just can't stuff in anything new, anything which requires self-examination, anything that requires humility.

By contrast, our reading from Philippians portrays what Jesus did when it came to His own authority. Although He was equal to God –the very visible image of God - something the Scribes and Pharisees never dared to claim for themselves – He did not see that as power to be used or exploited, but rather emptied Himself and took the form of a servant...He humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, even death upon a cross. Jesus always acted with compassion and with utter commitment to the Father and to the ones He came to save. He never boasted about Himself. If He was going to be praised and honoured, the words would have to come from the lips of those who loved Him. He was a Jewish man as well as God, and He put into action the promise of God that the nation of Israel would become a blessing to all the peoples of the earth. A blessing to the poor, the wretched, the gluttons and sinners and yes those Pharisees and Scribes trying to take Him down a peg on that day so long ago.

How then should we live? The short answer, like Him. The longer answer? We must not become entrapped in tradition and law and liturgy and merit or measure out mercy only when we believe it is deserved. We must be open to the newness of the Kingdom of God still breaking into our world and into our

churches...we must humble ourselves and walk peaceably among our neighbours....and we must be committed to becoming more like Jesus as we continue to walk in His grace and His love. It will mean change and challenge, it will mean new ways of thinking and of doing things, it will mean emptying ourselves of arrogance and of pride and becoming servants to others in the name of our Lord. In the name of the One who became a servant to us all.

Bottom Line? When God says “ Go” or “Tell” or “Do”, let’s be like a third son or daughter and just **say yes, and mean yes, and then get right to it.** Snappily! And Happily! God being our helper. Amen.

Prayers:

Thank you, loving Father, for choosing us as co-workers in your vineyard. Thank you that we are your sons and daughters by faith in Jesus Christ. May we go eagerly to offer kindness, love and service to our families, neighbours, and communities. May we be quick to welcome strangers and make them friends.

When we hesitate or fail or resist the promptings of your Spirit, help us to repent and receive both your forgiveness and your power to begin anew.

In all we do, and all we say, may we honour You. Amen.

Blessing:

Let us go forth to serve with joy in the Love of Christ. † And may Almighty God bless us: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.



