

Sermon for Sunday – October 1, 2017 –McClure
Matthew 21:23-32

Prayer: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable to you O God, our strength and our redeemer. Amen.

I had just gotten off the bus and my head was spinning as it often did after such a ride. You see the buses in the city of St. Georges, where I was living on my internship where really 7 passenger mini vans that could carry 9 people if you did it right. The city of St. George in the country of Grenada exists on the side of a mountain so there were no real strait roads - nor flat roads – you are either traveling up or down and always around something. The bus drivers are proud men who strut their unique stature as drivers by hanging as many gold necklaces and air fresheners, around the rear-view mirror as is possible. And who further announce their machismo by cranking the Reggae music up as loud as the speakers can manage. //Did I mention there is no speed limit posted on the roads of St. George and that there are only two traffic lights – well not real traffic lights but rather two traffic directors – men with white gloves who flail about like windmills trying to get head strong drivers to pay attention to their commands to stop and go. There are no real bus stops either you just stepped out into the street and waved when one of these mini vans was coming your way – trust me you could hear them coming - and when you wanted to get out - you just yelled “alright” and the driver would stop eventually. I had been in Grenada for about 12 weeks and though I had taken the bus many times it was always an adventure and a little disorientating.

On this particular afternoon the driver stopped at the bottom of the hill that led up to the Presbyterian Church. I had climbed that hill many times. Another thing that I had dealt with many times were people – mostly men - asking me for money. It had worried me at first but the people of the church urged me not to give them anything. They told me that those who were asking for money most likely thought I was a tourist - off one of the cruise ships and therefore someone with a lot of money. But they shouldn't be asking people who live here for money so just say you have nothing for them. So I took the advice of the church people and I began to say to those who would ask for money “I have nothing for you today.” I used that phrase a lot the few months – It got to be a rather automatic response that I didn't have to think too much about.

After I managed to get myself out of the bus - I started up the hill – nose down as to not trip over the cobble stones – I had taken only a few steps when a woman suddenly appeared out of the shadows – stepping out from one of the inset door ways. I jumped a bit when she stepped in front of me. She was an older woman, hollow eyes, thin and frail. She looked at me and asked softly if I had some money I could give to her. No, I said without much thought, “I have nothing for you today”. Then I stepped around her and continued up the hill to the church. When I got to the church I sat down in one of the back pews – as I was waiting for the others to arrive – they were running on Grenadian time - it dawned on me that this woman had been the only woman who had ever asked me for money – and the only older person. Grenada is a country that does not have anything like CPP or welfare. A woman without a family to take care of her would not have a source of income, or a system to care for her. It dawned on me that she may have really needed my help – infact she may have seen me passing by

her door many times on the way to the church – she might have known I worked with the church – she quite probably needed my help. I looked for her on my way home and again every time I passed that way but I never saw her again.

This encounter came to mind as I read this morning's gospel lesson. It was one of those moments in my life where I was saying no – no – no and not really paying attention.

I don't know about you but this world of ours is good at this - numbing us to real need. We hardly even look at each other anymore, so often our heads are down looking at our phones - connecting to people no were near us. I'm not saying this is bad I'm just suggesting that we don't really see each other anymore. Some of us are moving so fast that we don't have time to look at others - we stay the course. Some of us are so focused on managing our own lives and our own issues that to look beyond is an overwhelming thought. //

I think the challenge of the gospel lesson today is to think about all those many ways we respond without thinking, without connecting, without really seeing – those times when we act out of fear of losing face and status rather than acting out of compassion and truth regardless of the cost.

The chief priests and the elders wanted to challenge Jesus – they didn't like how he was connecting with those who in their society had been tossed aside, they didn't like how Jesus was seeing people's pain and acting to heal, they did like how he set aside the rules in favour of acting out of concern for the truth. So they asked him a question about the source of his authority not because they wanted so much to know the answer but because they wanted to get him into more trouble. Instead of answering their trick question he lobs the ball back into their court.

Jesus asks them about where the baptism "that John proclaimed" came from. It was an equally tricky question - they couldn't answer - not because they didn't know the truth but because they were afraid of the consequences of their answer. Jesus refuses then to play their game. In the next section Jesus uses a parable to help them understand his way in the world. Jesus challenges those who say no - to so much – to those who are numbed to the needs around them and who will not accept his new teaching of compassion and love – he challenges them with a story. Jesus shows them that the son who says no at first but then does what the father asks does the right thing. Jesus teaches that there is time to change your mind, there is time to get it right – there is time to do what God is calling you to do. There is time to change your actions - there is time to move from judgement to compassion, from rules to justice.

In a few minutes we are going to celebrate the sacrament of Communion – a meal shared around the world today in many Christian communities. It is a meal that reminds us all of God's very indwelling, God's very concrete action of nurturing and feeding - of forgiveness and blessing. Every meal is an opportunity it is a time to experience God anew, to experience a change of mind and heart. A time to reset to the ways of God.

May we have the courage to live lives of compassion and justice. May we have the wisdom to change our minds for the sake of the gospel.

Amen

Matthew 21:23-32

²³When Jesus 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.