

I come to you in the name of one God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

The religious leaders of the temple in Jerusalem are concerned. Here comes the man Jesus, rumors of his actions and teachings reaching their ears before he even arrives, marching into the city to shouts of hosanna, son of David. They are even more concerned today as Jesus has spent his first day in Jerusalem driving out the money changers, flipping tables, disrupting the normal operations at the temple, and here he returns to do who knows what. And by what authority is he doing all this? What authority does this man presume to hold that allows him to disrupt the standard practices of their temple? The temple leaders are a little curious, but more concerned, hopeful that they can at least reign in this man Jesus at least a little bit. When he was out in the country it was one thing, but to do this in the temple of Jerusalem is another thing entirely. And so, they come to Jesus. They ask Jesus by what authority are you doing these things and who gave you this authority? They hope to trap Jesus and strip him of the mythos that has sprung up around him. To expose him as a fraud, or at the very least just another man, no true religious leader. But, a conversation with Jesus is never easy, a question is never answered in the way you hope it will be, because the call that we have in Christ is not easy, the call we have in Christ is not always what we hope it will be.

The temple leaders are hoping to trap Jesus into answering that his authority is derived of human origin, namely himself, and therefore is no real authority, or that he draws it from heaven, an easily disproved notion biblically and historically at best (for the temple leaders draw their own heavenly authority passed down by Moses through the generations), downright heresy at worst. But Jesus puts before them the question of John.

And they scramble. They cannot answer either way because it would either legitimize a man they hold no high regard for, or infuriate a populace that they work diligently to control. So, they simply choose to ignore and offer no answer. And, Jesus punishes them for their refusal to live into their faith, their refusal to be the presence of God that they claim to be.

Jesus presses the temple leaders, who does the will of the father? Is it the one who says no but repents and does the act, or is it the one that says yes, without any intention of ever living into the promise? Clearly it is the first. Clearly the will of the father is done when the actual action is done. We can all say we follow the father, we can all say we are the authority, we can all say that we have faith, but if we refuse to actually do the will of the father, to live into the call that is put before us, can we really be said to have that faith, to be the authority, to say we are following?

Of course not.

Our faith, our call to live into our faith, to exercise an authority in that call, is only realized when we act on that faith. It is only realized when we turn God down, realize our error, repent, and do the will of God anyways, even though we had previously turned away. Faith then, is not about our words, it is about our actions. There is no sense in pretending to be the religious authority if you are simply going to pay lip service to the call to go out into the vineyard and tend the vines, to harvest the fruit of your labor. You cannot be the religious authority if you are going to rely on words to carry the weight of your faith. You cannot be the religious authority if you cannot recognize and distinguish authority that is of human origin and that which is of heavenly origin.

If that is the way you wish to go about your business as a member of the religious authority, then don't be surprised when tax collectors and prostitutes go into heaven ahead of you. They may have turned from God, turned from the religious authority of the time, but they turned back to God and followed, in holding up John, in listening to Christ, in recognizing authority given of heaven in the here and now, not the human authority that had supplanted an earlier giving.

There is an ever-increasing danger in our current cultural climate that hands over authority to that which is of human origin, ignoring our call to that which is given of heaven, of saying we will follow the will of the Father, without ever leaving the keyboard. All you have to do is read the day's headlines to see human authority being corrupted, being held up as the measure to which we must attain, turning away from the will of the Father in order to do the will of a corrupt corp of human leadership looking out for only themselves. This happens when religious leaders of our time declare that politicians are ordained by God to be our leaders. This happens when politicians feed into the "us vs. them" narrative that has cleaved our society in two, driving a wedge between neighbors, creating a false sense that we have to support one party over the other, regardless of how we feel about what is the "appropriate" policy stances of every political and socio-political issue that a single letter purports to uphold.

Luckily, people who helped build up this system are beginning to realize that we have gone astray from the path that we are called to be on. It has taken loud and in-your-face actions from those who have been oppressed to even be noticed. It has taken media firestorms. It has taken social media posts that supported those willing to take a

stand. It has taken political leaders that lash out at those who threaten their corrupted vision of a great America. It has taken great sadness, righteous anger, and personal sacrifice. It has taken all of this and more, for people to begin to see that our human constructs of authority are not the end-all-be-all of this world. That there exists right before us a higher authority that calls us to lead a different type of life. A life that demands action, not words. A life that demands a turning back to God when we have turned away. A life that calls into question those who prop themselves up as religious authorities only to use that position of power to tear others down while feeding into the power-hungry egos of the human-made authorities. A life that stands in support as others kneel. A life that praises those willing to stand against their “kind” and end legislation that would cause direct harm to millions. A life that not only listens to but does the will of the Father.

Clearly through all of this, there are those who will still refuse to change their minds and believe. They are stuck just like the religious authorities of the temple in today’s Gospel. If they admit to their errors, they fear that they will lose everything they have worked so hard to build up. If they admit to their errors, they know that they will be held accountable for what they have, and more importantly have not, done. As we turn back to God, we must leave room for these too to turn back to God. If we pontificate and lord over them our own righteousness in doing the will of God, we are missing the point, we are just as bad as those who refuse to turn back to God. For we cannot truly turn back to God unless we are willing to look past the human authority and realize that it does not really matter. That our righteousness is important for our own souls, and has no bearing on anyone else. That our practice of faith is only important for our own understanding of doing the will of

the Father and has no bearing on anyone else. We can help others find this understanding, we can help others turn back to God, we can help others do the will of the Father, and we do this by living into the will of the Father, by constantly turning back to God, seeking repentance for our own faults, our own sins, experiencing forgiveness, and putting that love back out into the world.

If we want to turn the hearts of the authorities of our time, we will do so by doing the will of the Father. If we want to change our society, our culture, into a more just, grace-filled, loving, caring experience of existence, we will do so by doing the will of the Father. And, it's ok if we haven't started doing the will of the Father yet. It's ok if we have been caught up in arguing the import of the human authorities of our time, because we can always turn back to God and go and do the work that is called of us. Sometimes that work will look like Jesus driving out money changers and flipping tables, even in the holy spaces. Sometimes that work will look like having a cup of coffee or a enjoying a pint with someone who you are politically opposed to. And, sometimes that work will be as simple as acknowledging our own faults, getting down on our knees, asking God for forgiveness for our faults, the faults of our society that we have been complicit in, and promising to do better this upcoming week. God will grant that forgiveness, every time, as long as we ask for it, and then go out again trying to do the will of the Father.

Amen.