

If you are a little confused to see me here in the pulpit and see pastor Cath sitting back there, it's okay. At least I hope it's okay. I am vicar Ed Baseman if you missed it before and as part of my vicarage, my internship here at Our Savior's, I will preach from time to time.

There have been a lot of questions asked of and about Jesus. There certainly are a lot of questions in the Gospel of Matthew. It seems like everyone around Jesus has a question or even lots of questions. The disciples around Jesus are forever asking him about this and that. How do we fit into the big picture of your ministry, who's the greatest among us? Even the mother of the Zebedee boys, the disciples James and John, asked Jesus if her boys could have the choicest spots with him in paradise. Just like any good Jewish mother would, I suppose,

Our reading starts with a question, a question this time about Jesus. The chief priests and elders of the Jerusalem Temple come to Jesus as he is teaching and ask him "by what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?" First off, I wonder what he was doing to provoke the question.

Starting back at the beginning of chapter 21, we can get an idea. Jesus came riding into Jerusalem to shouts of acclamation and palms and garments spread in his path. That probably got their attention...

And then Jesus shook up the Temple of God in Jerusalem, the focal point of Jewish worship –the Chief Priests and Elder's turf. He upset business as usual-worship as usual-- at the Temple, chasing out the moneychangers and dove sellers. I'm sure they were watching him now...

As if that wasn't enough, he was curing blind and lame people as they came with him into the Temple; this Jesus was seen and known to be friends with all sorts of unsavory characters, this no-account itinerant rabbi from nowhere–special Nazareth. Who does he think he is?

And so these priests and elders asked Jesus their question, which really amounts to who are you?

Jesus tells them, I will answer your question if you answer mine. And he proceeds to back them into a corner from which they cannot or will not escape. They can't admit that John's baptism is of God—that would mean that they were not right with God, not listening to a true prophet and repenting. If they say John's baptism is of men, the crowd, who believe that John sent from God will rise up in anger. They can't have that. These officials need everything to stay calm. That's the deal Jewish leaders have struck with the Roman Empire—keep everybody under control, or else. Or else the Peace of Rome will rise up and crush the troublemakers and the temple will fall. Which is what happened about 50 years later.

What about us? Are we backed into a corner, too? No. Jesus didn't stay in the temple arguing. He went on, he kept going, leading us all out of our dark corners to the cross, into the grave and beyond. We are free in Christ from getting stuck, in dark corners, yes, but so much more. We set free from bondage to sin in Christ Jesus.

So we know who this Jesus is, by what authority he operates—It is the authority of God. The very end of the Gospel of Matthew tells us. “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

We are part of that group of disciples, products of that Great Commission. God is telling us in Christ Jesus, Go, work in my vineyard making disciples, baptizing, teaching, obeying...

And so there's a question for us at the heart of the parable Jesus tells in the 2nd half of reading. What are we doing with our baptized and forgiven selves? It's not about working our way to heaven; we already have that assurance in baptism. It's about who we are as God's people. As part of God's family, how do we respond? When our heavenly father asks us to go and work today who are we most like? The one who says no but does go, or the one who says yes but never does quite make it.

I recognize myself in both of those. Often enough I don't get it right. I say one thing and do another, I do one thing and say... the story probably sounds familiar to you.. But then again, I'm not hopeless, either. In Christ Jesus, none of us are. If you look around this place at all you can see workers in God's vineyard faithfully toiling away. Not always perfectly, sometimes reluctantly I'm sure, but at work.

Our Savior's has an impressive and growing record of going to work in God's vineyard, of bringing a bit of the kingdom of heaven closer in this world. Because that's what Jesus is forever doing –giving a preview of the kingdom of God. What Jesus was doing the temple, and all throughout his ministry on earth was ushering in a bit of the kingdom of heaven-drawing the broken, the lame, the sinful to himself and making them whole, turning them back to God. It is a foretaste of what is to come.

In Guatemala some of you have bent your backs and worked to bring a glimpse of what the grace of God can, does and will do. From the wreckage of Joplin and Louisiana you have been the hands of Christ hammering and fitting common boards and such into God's promises kept and sanctified. In these and many other places you share God's love and bring the kingdom of God closer by doing God's work. Some of your hands have used tools, some have written checks, some have been folded in prayerful support; together it is powerful stuff.

You can see the kingdom of God around you here as you share God's peace and love each week; as you faithfully answer calls to give as you are able, to serve as you can -

-even if it means committee work. You welcome strangers to this place. So many people have told me that they are here at their members here because they have been welcomed, because they have felt adopted into the love of God expressed here.

And I have felt it too. As we were reeling from my son Tyler's death this past July, Our Savior's reached out to my family and me. Some of you were present at Ty's visitation and funeral, and we were touched with your words, flowers and cards of caring sympathy and by your prayers on our behalf. Please know we have appreciated and will always cherish your extravagant care for us, which began even before we entered into this community of faith.

Pastor Cath described this time of grieving for Tyler as Holy Time, and we have felt that truly as we make our way towards our "new normal" without Tyler in our lives here. We ask for your continued prayers and support-Tyler leaves a huge empty spot in our lives here even as we know he is safe in heaven now. I wish you could've met him. I know I can speak for my wife Judy and my son Erik as I thank you for your welcome to us here. My sister Lanie and my mother Arleen felt your warm welcome here and they thank you too.

I'm excited and fortunate to be here in your midst learning to be a pastor. You have so much to teach me I'm sure, and I know I have lots to learn from you as well. Pastor Cath is the ideal supervisor for me—I don't think there could be a better fit between my needs and her strengths. An excellent partnership. Thank you for what you have already done for my family and me. Thanks in advance for what I know will be your loving teaching in the coming months of my internship. I know you will train me up well.

God's blessings on us all as we work in this vineyard of God called Our Savior's. When we act according to God's will we are living into our salvation here and now.

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