

Our Redeemer Lutheran Church
Quincy, IL
Rev. Martin Eden

Pentecost 18
Saturday, September 30, 2023, at 5:00 p.m.
Sunday, October 1, 2023, at 9:00 a.m.

“The Change Inside of You Has Come from Outside of You”

Matthew 21:23-32

They asked Him, “Who gave you this authority?” The Jews were angry with Jesus, because the day earlier, He had cleared the Temple of the moneychangers and sellers of animals. They wanted to talk about this. They challenged Him. They challenged His authority to do this. Were they looking for Him to perform a miracle? Their unbelief was resolute. They were not looking for evidence so as to bring about a change in their heart.

Besides, Jesus has already told a crowd demanding a sign that the only sign they will get from Him is the “sign of Jonah.” He was three days in the belly of the fish. Just as Jesus will be three days in the belly of the earth.

So Jesus answers their question with a question, because if Jesus wants to have a debate about who has authority at the Temple, He wants to talk about the real authority at the Temple. What authority comes from God and what authority comes from man? So Jesus begins by talking about Baptism.

Was the Baptism of John something from heaven or from man? By whose authority did he preach and baptize? As the chief priests say, they can't answer that question. They will be seen either as opposing God or opposing the crowd – and they don't want to be seen as doing either (even though they are both in opposition to God and the people of God). John's Baptism was from heaven, and they knew it. But they didn't like his message.

John's Baptism was a Baptism of promise. And it was a Baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sin. The chief priests and elders in Jerusalem wanted nothing to do with John's Baptism because repentance demands that real change occurs. It doesn't just mean that you act a little bit differently in public. It means that you think differently. It literally means that you have a change of mind and that you turn around from where you once were. As we heard from Ezekiel, "Repent and turn from all your transgressions."

True repentance involves real change inside of you. But this type of change only comes from outside of you. Your repentance – the change that has taken place in you – is from heaven. The forgiveness of sin, the burden of guilt taken off of you, comes from heaven.

These past few weeks, the parables we have heard Jesus tell, the Parable of the Lost Sheep, the Unmerciful Servant, the Workers in the Vineyard all demonstrate the mercy and graciousness of our forgiving, loving Lord and Master. He is the One who brings real and lasting change.

Our response, by definition, cannot be “business as usual.” The chief priests and elders of the people were determined to get back to “business as usual.” They had no interest in repentance. They saw no need to change. They saw no need for forgiveness.

John’s Baptism was a Baptism of promise. The Baptism you have received is a Baptism of fulfillment. Like John’s Baptism, yours was a Baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sin. But even more, you were baptized “in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.” You belong to God. You are under a different authority. Everything has changed. Your response cannot be “business as usual.”

We come to church; we confess our faith; we confess our sins; we hear the Gospel; we sing our songs of praise to God. We gather one hour each week and acknowledge that everything has changed. But what about the other 167 hours during the week? Are there words spoken during that time which you would be ashamed to speak within these walls?

During the 167 hours not spent in worship here, have in mind Paul’s words we heard from his letter to the Philippians – don’t just look out for your own interests, but also the interests of others. Be blameless, innocent, “children of God without blemish”. In the midst of this dark, crooked, twisted generation, “shine as lights in the world.”

Peter says in his first epistle, “be holy in all your conduct.” I ask you, “Are you ‘holy?’” If you define holiness as being blameless, innocent, and without blemish; if we just look at our actions, we have to say, “No”. However, in Christ, under the grace of your Baptism, you are to confidently answer “Yes.” You are holy, blameless, innocent, and without blemish, because God has declared you to be holy. As you have engaged in the holy things of God: Holy Baptism, Holy Communion, Holy Scripture; you have proximity to God and the Holy Spirit fills you through Word and Sacrament – His holy things.

Live each moment of the day knowing that, in Christ, everything has changed. And the authority that has brought about the change in you is from heaven. As I said last week, “Our hope and our confidence does not find its strength in the amount of work we accomplish, or in the length of time that we have devoted to work within the Kingdom of God. Our hope and confidence is in the work that Christ has done for us on our behalf. He paid the ransom price for our sin. He died and rose again, so that we can have our place within the Kingdom. The change inside of you has come from outside of you.

Just like Jesus’ conversation with the chief priests and elders, our conversation concerning the heavenly authority under which we live, begins with Baptism. Amen.