

St. Thomas's Episcopal Church  
Newark, DE  
Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost – October 1, 2017/Year A  
Ezekiel 18:1-4, 25-32; Psalm 25:1-8; Philippians 2:1-13; Matthew 21:23-32  
The Reverend Paul W. Gennett, Jr.

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*May my words reveal the greater glory of God. AMEN*

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**That's not fair!!!** The echo of our childhood ways when we believed that anything done any other way than what we wanted was done **against me! That's not fair!!!** Gratefully we enter our adult years and, as St. Paul commends, "*out of our childish ways,*" we do not embrace this personal affront **any longer ... well, not that often ... okay, perhaps sometimes but not all the time!**

**That's not fair!!!** It seems this hue and cry is embraced at this time of year by many young and old as we cheer our favorite college and professional football teams. It seems that no matter what the "zebras" do, it is never right, not for MY TEAM anyhow.

**That's not fair!!!** We seem to be in a time and cycle of life where not taking responsibility for OUR actions, or inactions, is the predominant behavior du jour. When "**That's not fair**" is my favorite fight song, then EVERYBODY and EVERYTHING that is done is done against me.

**That's not fair!!!** In our faith journey with Jesus, we know what Jesus would do in response to the inequalities of life on life's terms. So the question of Jesus to us this day ... **what will you do about it with me?**

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**That's not fair!!!** This is not a new fight song. It is as old as our journey of faith since the beginning!

The prophet Ezekiel walks with a people in dispersion after the Babylonian conquered Jerusalem, destroyed the Temple for the first time, and spread God's chosen people hither, thither, and yon. Yet they remain trapped in doing the things of worship, and treating the people around them the same ways as in the days when they ruled through the Temple.

While they point to the tally sheets of sins of the previous generations, Ezekiel says "**Nope, not the way this new life of God's kingdom come works. YOU are called to be responsible for your own life and faith actions. Those people can turn in transformed life with the Holy One just like you, 613 Levitical laws or not. If you want others to be responsible, YOU be responsible! Change you to bless others!**" As St. Paul later commends to his beloved community of Philippi, "*Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus ... work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for God's good pleasure.*"

Jesus and the disciples make their way from the relative safety of the Galilean countryside into the wheelhouse of power, the second Temple of Jerusalem. NOW is the time that Jesus and the disciples take responsibility to show what the kingdom of God looks like **on EARTH as it is in heaven** to the religious powers of their day through their living.

We can quickly diminish anyone else's call to serve in ministry by asking the rule bound question that stops so many right at the line of scrimmage – "*By what authority are you doing these things, and WHO gave you this authority?*" I suspect many might break into a slight cold and clammy sweat over our brow and on the palms of our hands.

**But not Jesus!** He knows the rabbinical Midrash game well. He brings in a play they would least expect from an itinerant pseudo-rabbi – "*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.*" The question of the source of power and baptismal authority for John the Baptist throws them into their own huddle. "**If we say this, then he will answer that ... but if we say that, then he will answer this ... so we just won't answer him.**" They break from their huddle ... they answer with their non-answer ... and Jesus does the same. He adds a parable about two sons just to push them further into the "red zone."

To live a life doing the will of God is to respect and adhere to Jesus' authority as our teacher and Lord. To live a life in which one gives **lip service but not life service** is to disrespect the authority of Jesus. Matthew probably meant his community to hear this parable as a summons to the leaders of their day to imitate the first son and join them in believing in Jesus. I suspect he also meant it as a nudge to those followers who had initially said "yes" and then wavered. Some people struggle to make a commitment in the first place, but once they do, are able to muster the discipline and enthusiasm to honor it. It often becomes a **spiritual game-changer** for your life and faith. Others seem to have less trouble coming to a decision, but then have trouble following through. Many of us fall somewhere in between.

To all of us imperfect disciples, Jesus addresses the question, "*Which of you is doing the will of the Father?*"

- **Are we participating in the kingdom of God, not yet, but already arrived?**
- **Are we committed to active response and obedience to God and not just lip service?**
- **Are we becoming one with Jesus and moving forward in faith?**
- **Are we committed to serving the lost and excluded?**

Our lives can be guided by Christ's vision and living. Christ desires to be the center of our decision-making process. We can embody the spirit, energy, and power that characterized Christ's mission. Open to and guided by Christ, we experience solidarity with all creation and live in unity with our brothers and sisters in faith. We embrace with Christ's spacious spirit to serve a world in which abundance and love are the norm for human interactions and decision-making. We discover a divine-human synergy and work out our salvation with awe and energy. **God is at work in you to embody Christ now.**

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**“I am responsible/. When anyone, anywhere, reaches out for help, I want the hand of A.A. always to be there. And for that I am responsible.”**

This is one of those sayings that rattle around Twelve Step rooms. It has great weight and resonance to me for living the life of faith as well and moving WITH Jesus in the Jesus Movement. It says to me if **I want to receive grace, be gracious ... if I want peace, live peace ... if I want compassion, live compassionately ... if words matter, watch the words we use.** It is really, really simple to do when you think about it. The question of Jesus before us as people of the Jesus Movement -- **what will you do about it with me?**

Matthew’s Gospel challenges us to **walk the talk.** Theological correctness is secondary to faithful living in action. You can have a checkered past and yet embody God’s vision in the world. Jesus is not undermining theology then or now, individual or congregational participation, or personal spiritual practices. Jesus opens the door to serving God at any stage of our lives, in any ways with our gifts, large or small. Nothing or no one bars us from faithful discipleship, including past history, theological ineptness, economic status, ethnicity, or gender. **Any person** can say “yes” to God’s vision and follow Christ’s path.

The question of Jesus before us as people of the Jesus Movement -- **what will you do about it with me?**

*AMEN*