



Trinity United Methodist Church Newsletter



2084 Wilson Pike · Franklin, TN 37067 · 615.794.2665
Pastor Dennis Meaker: 615.794.2665 · djmeaker@gmail.com

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Doing the Will of God

³¹ Which of the two did the will of his father?" Matthew 21:31 NRSV

Read Matthew 21:23-32. This text probes two questions: What do we believe about God? And What are we willing to do about our beliefs?

I.

When reading the Gospels it's easy to fall into the trap of simply reading the stories about Jesus without allowing them to touch our lives. In this text from Matthew for instance, we are given a story about Jesus outsmarting the religious authorities. Jesus is living in his last days, shortly after his entry into Jerusalem. He is teaching in the temple after having caused a small riot by turning over the tables of the money changers equating the Priests and Temple Leaders with robbers and thieves.

The authorities ask him by what authority he is doing these things. Not so much the teaching as that was pretty much a constant activity by everyone on the Temple grounds as people taught and debated. Jesus is being asked by what authority he turned over the tables of the money changers and passed judgment on the priests and others. We are told that Jesus is tricking the authorities by asking the question about the authority of John the Baptist. If they say that John's Baptism came from God they open themselves up to attack because they did not support John's Baptism. If they say that John was just a preacher with no special authority they anger the people who believed in John. So they answer, "We don't know." Jesus wins the exchange when he says that that he will not tell them where his authority comes from.

Read as simply a story we can applaud Jesus for winning. But remember that the Gospels were written for Christians to help them in their faith journey. They were intended to confront people about their faith and beliefs. They were not written as entertainment. So let's look a little more closely at the answer given by the authorities and Jesus and think about what we can learn.

II.

First of all, there is nothing wrong in saying in response to a matter of faith, "We don't know." The very fact that we are talking about faith implies some level of ignorance, doesn't it? That's why we need faith. We believe in something that we can't touch or see, something that we can't prove. Admitting ignorance is not something we need be ashamed about. But, even when we don't know the answer to something, we often need

to make a choice about what we believe to be true and then act on that belief. Unless we make choices we don't have a basis for making other decisions.

Think about it this way. You are driving along and suddenly you see flashing blue lights in your rearview mirror and hear a siren. It's not a marked police car and you know that it might not be a police car. Nevertheless, you have to decide what to do. If you believe it's a police car you pull over. If you believe that there is a good chance that it isn't, maybe you drive slowly to a gas station or some other public place to stop. But you have to decide what you think reality is and then act.

It's possible that the religious authorities Jesus confronted did not know by what authority John Baptized. In fact it's likely that some believed that he was a prophet of God. But they conducted themselves as if John's authority was self-conferred; that he was not a prophet of God. They made a decision about what they believed and they acted upon it.

Christians are called to do that as well. We must decide if God has authority over our lives. One of Tennessee's most notable citizens was Alvin York. York was an often arrested rowdy from the Cumberland Plateau. He ultimately converted to Christianity and put his life of drunken brawling behind him. Drafted into the army during WWI, he had to confront what he believed about God and what he would do about it. Becoming Christian had changed York's life. On the course he was traveling he'd probably have been killed in a bar fight or ended up in prison. He might even have ended up killing someone else.

After his conversion, York believed that God had authority over his life. He feared that he could not be a soldier and a Christian as well. He believed that it would be wrong to take another's life for any reason. He was granted leave to return home and talk with his pastor and pray about his decision. Ultimately he determined that his service was not in conflict with his beliefs about God and Christ. That God would wish him to oppose the forces of evil. Others faced with the same decision, determined otherwise. They believed that God would not wish them to kill for any reason and so refused to enter the service. Both had to decide what authority God had in their lives and face up to the consequences of their decisions.

Each of us must make a decision about our faith beliefs. It's not sufficient to simply say, "We don't know." Like the authorities Jesus's challenges, we must decide if we believe that there is a God and if Jesus' authority comes from God. And then we must decide what we are going to do about it.

Jesus follows the encounter with the religious authorities with the parable about the two sons.

III.

There is an old saying that applies to Jesus' parable about the two sons that follows this exchange with the religious leaders. "Do as I say, not as I do." It's usually used when talking to our children. Our children see us doing something that we have told them not to do and we tell them, "Do as I say, not as I do." This saying is based upon the reality that what **we do** speaks much louder than any words we can use. How we live our lives reflects our core beliefs about ourselves, God and the world.

And so Jesus tells the parable about the two sons. The father tells the first, "Go work in the fields." The son says "No. I won't work in the fields." But then he relents and works the fields. The second says, "Yeah, I'll go to work right now." But then he slacks off and never works. Which of the two does the will of the Father? The first who answered the Father's request with actions even if he at first refused.

This is a parable that often makes people uncomfortable. There is a long history in the Protestant Church that emphasizes the faith commitment over what is sometimes referred to as ‘works.’ To some extent that is a valid criticism. A basic protestant belief is that there is nothing we can do to earn the Grace of God. God’s grace is a gift that must be accepted. Yet, this parable suggests that there is more to accepting the Grace of God than the words that come from our mouths. Consider this passage from earlier in Matthew:

²¹ *“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven. Matthew 7:21*

Coupled with this parable it seems that Jesus is a believer in the idea that what we do speaks louder about what we believe than what we say.

Understand the distinction I’m making. I am not saying that we must do things to earn the Grace of God; that we must do works that earn our salvation. Salvation is a gift from God. It cannot be earned. But, have we accepted that gift of salvation if we ignore those things that scripture tells us God cares about? Let me try an extreme example.

On the one hand, consider the person of one of the leaders of the Ku Klux Klan fifty years ago. He was baptized as a young adult, confessed Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and attends Church every Sunday. He also organizes a bombing of an African American church that kills a number of Children.

On the other hand you have a founding member of American Atheists. He has no belief in God, no belief in Jesus Christ and firmly believes that the Church is one of the worst institutions ever created. Yet his whole life is geared toward reaching out to his neighbor and relieving the suffering of others. He’d give you the shirt off his back if you asked for it and would do anything in his power to help a neighbor. Which of these two men has done the will of God? Put aside questions of salvation, who is going to heaven. Between these two men, which is doing the will of God? The atheist.

Now, let’s compare our Atheist with a good Church going Christian who, other than support for his church, never undertakes to live out his faith in the world? Which has done the will of God?

Paul offers some guidance for what our faith should be about. He says, “Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus.” Then he says:

¹² *Therefore, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed me, not only in my presence, but much more now in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; ¹³ for it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure.*

If you have accepted Christ with your heart and life as well as your mind, God will work in your life enabling you to do God’s will. Accepting Christ as Lord and Savior means more than speaking the words. We are called to live those words everyday of our lives.

A Letter From Bishop McAlilly

June 19, 2015

Dear Sisters and Brothers;

Across the Nashville Area of the United Methodist Church, there is shock and sadness at the violent acts perpetrated upon our brothers and sisters at Emmanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina. While any form of violence against any person or people for any reason is unacceptable, we are further grieved that racial prejudice appears to be the motivation for the attack. Our Social Principles state that “racism plagues and cripples our growth in Christ, inasmuch as it is antithetical to the gospel itself” (Book of Discipline, paragraph 162).

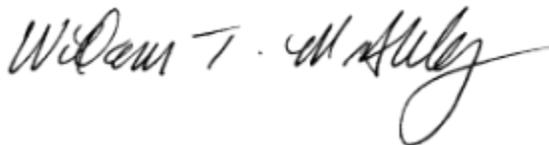
We are told in scripture that all people are created in the image of God (Genesis 1:27), and that in the fully realized state of humanity made known to us in Jesus Christ, all of the categories we use to divide ourselves, including race, gender, and socio-economic status all fall away and we become one as God intended (Galatians 3:28).

As we pause today, let us remember, especially, our African American pastors and congregations as they ponder the deep-seated hatred and anger that is directed towards them simply because of their color. As we evaluate our current safety plans and welcoming of the stranger with generous and radical hospitality, may we do so acknowledging we live in a world where evil still exists. May we remember, even though we walk through the valley of the shadow of death, God through Jesus Christ is still with us.

Our weeping and mourning will make for some long nights. As people of faith we know joy and forgiveness, justice and reconciliation will roll down as waters, and righteousness as an ever-flowing stream.

We urge all people to pray for the nine victims of this shooting and their families, for the people of Emmanuel AME Church, for the perpetrator and his family, and for the Charleston community. We renew our commitment to stand against the evils of racism and prejudice in all forms. We look forward to the day that violence, hatred, and death will be no more when God’s Kingdom is fully realized on earth.

Serving Christ With You,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "William T. McAlilly". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Bishop William T. McAlilly

The Poverty and Justice Bible

¹⁶ *The judges and the other people told the priests and prophets, "Since Jeremiah only told us what the LORD our God had said, we don't think he deserves to die." Jeremiah 26:16 CEV*

Jeremiah was told by God to convey the message that Jerusalem, for its sin and infidelity, especially for its lack of justice, would be destroyed. Understandably vexed, the authorities arrested Jeremiah and put him on trial. But, others urged leniency, even though Jeremiah's words could be construed as treasonous and as giving aid and comfort to the enemy. Jeremiah was only the messenger. In much the same way, the bible is only the messenger and, as difficult as it sometimes is to hear and proclaim the words of scripture, we should not ignore those who do so. As these articles have attempted to demonstrate for around two years now, the bible speaks repeatedly about the need to care for one another. Rather than 'kill the messengers' perhaps it is time to take those words to heart.

Jesus left and returned to his hometown with his disciples. ² The next Sabbath he taught in the Jewish meeting place. Many of the people who heard him were amazed and asked, "How can he do all this? Where did he get such wisdom and the power to work these miracles? ³ Isn't he the carpenter, the son of Mary? Aren't James, Joseph, Judas, and Simon his brothers? Don't his sisters still live here in our town?" The people were very unhappy because of what he was doing.

⁴ But Jesus said, "Prophets are honored by everyone, except the people of their hometown and their relatives and their own family." ⁵ Jesus could not work any miracles there, except to heal a few sick people by placing his hands on them. ⁶ He was surprised that the people did not have any faith. Mark 6:1-6 CEV

Jesus is having a difficult time as well. Just as the people were unhappy with Jeremiah's message so the people of Jesus' hometown are reluctant to listen to Jesus. When we don't like what we hear, we tend to look for flaws in the messenger, While that is certainly appropriate if we are to evaluate everything we are told, our desire to find a reason to ignore a difficult message can blind us to its validity.

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The Poverty & Justice Bible is a bible that highlights each passage of scripture that deals with the issues of poverty and justice. There are more than 2000 references in scripture to poverty and justice, as opposed to four or five on such controversial subjects as homosexual acts or marriage. Yet many Christians seem to think that helping the poor is a pointless and even harmful act. As an on-going part of this newsletter, I will be providing citations to passages from the Old and New Testaments each week that deal with what scripture tells us about poverty and justice. If you are interested in learning more about *The Poverty & Justice Bible* you can check on Amazon.com or go to www.Justicebible.org.

Prayer Ministry

The following persons are part of the prayer ministry at Trinity UMC:

Elva Beard	Mac McAfee	Kenneth Stevens	Judy Richardson
Larry Eastwood	Rachel Newman	Patricia Stevens	Charles Wilson
Leslie Eastwood		Sam Richardson	

The members of the prayer ministry of Trinity United Methodist church covenant with one another to pray daily for:

- Those concerns on the prayer list of the Church and for healing of body and spirit for all persons listed;
- For each ministry of the church that each ministry would work to bring the Gospel to those within our community and most especially to bring the Gospel to those who have not yet accepted Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior;
- For all the members of the Trinity UMC community that they be led and enabled to live as the Body of Christ;
- For our local community and all its needs, especially for those who are struggling with the burden of poverty;
- For our nation and our world that God help lead the people of the world to live in peace with God's Kingdom.

If you would like to be a part of this ministry (or if you have already spoken to me about it and were inadvertently left off the list) please let me know and I will see that you are added.

Up-Coming Sermons

June 28th: Is Jesus Insane? People really suggested that about Jesus. We know what the writers of the Gospels believed. What do we believe? My texts are 2 Corinthians 4:13-5:1 and Mark 3:20-35.

July 5th: Lazy Farmers and Shade Weeds: When Jesus starts telling us what the Kingdom of God is like it can become pretty confusing. My texts are 2 Corinthians 5:6-10, 14-17 and Mark 4:26-34.

Worship Leader's Schedule

June 28

Nancy Conway, **Liturgist**

Tommy & Jo Cotton, **Greeters**

Jeanne Rybolt & Linda Robinson, **Ushers**

July 5

Jason Aldred, **Liturgist**

Pat Moran & Sam Richardson, **Greeters**

Mike & Elaine Rohrig, **Ushers**

Announcements

The “Companions in Christ” Sunday School class has begun a study, “Knowing God.” We have extra books and extra chairs if you would care to join our class. All are welcome at 9:45 each Sunday Morning.

There will be a joint Administrative Council and program Council meeting on July 11th at 9:00 AM in the Fellowship Hall.

June Birthdays

Lynn McGill, Jo Cotton, Mike Fetting, Richard Stevens, Nancy Conway, Kenneth Stevens, Larry Eastwood, June Pollard

Happy Birthday to each of you!