

October 1, 2023: A Pastoral Message by Pastor Margaret Keyser

~ Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost~

*“Christ Knows our Hearts and our Minds.”*

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**Scripture Reading: Matthew 21 v 23 -32**

**1. Introduction:**

Every day, we encounter individuals around us, at home, our neighbors, at the stores, our work, and here at church. We strive to live our lives authentically and do the best we can to love and show kindness to those around us. We also encounter individuals in various volunteer and leadership positions in life, and we ourselves have our own positions at home, at work, and here at church. We sometimes ask ourselves and reflect on how we behave and act from our positions in these diverse settings, and how others perceive us. Are we at peace with others and what they are meant to do and are we at peace with ourselves and what we are meant to do in life and here at church.

**2. Christ knows our hearts and minds:**

This morning, our passages consist of two distinct parts, yet with the same focus. In the first section, Jesus is teaching in the temple courts in Jerusalem, surrounded by numerous people, including the chief priests and the elders. He is being questioned by these leaders regarding the authority by which He was teaching, followed by a counter question by Jesus. Instead of answering them, He asked them what they thought about John's Baptism, whether it originated from heaven or from human beings. The question is about the authority and essence of John's baptisms, since John was sent ahead of Jesus to lead His ministry and message. He would also baptize Jesus, after which Jesus was filled with the Holy Spirit. So, in this first passage we are dealing with these temple leaders, who felt their authority was threatened by this man from Galilee coming here to their temple, invading their territory and therefore they questioned the authority by which He claimed He was doing these things. They are afraid to answer Him about John, so they told Him they don't know.

In the second passage Jesus asks them a two-fold question, “What do you think” about these two sons who were asked by their father to go and work in the vineyard. The first one refused to go, but then changed his mind. The second one agreed to go, but then did not. He then asked, “which of the two did what their father wanted?” Their response was, “The first one.”

Then Jesus returns to address the question of John the Baptist, sort of saying to them, you know who he was. You know that he came through the power God, sent ahead of Me, who would come after him. You know that. He came to speak about the way of life according to the will of God. You heard him, and you decided not to repent and not to believe him. This is what will happen, He said, “I tell you the truth, the tax collectors, and prostitutes whom you despise and consider beneath you, believed him and so will be entering the Kingdom of God before you”. And so, Jesus, continued, you answered correctly about the two sons. It was the first one who did the right thing. He did what his father asked him to do. He repented his negative behaviors, turned around and went and worked in the vineyard. It is one thing to know the correct answer, but it is another to do what that son did. You did not. You refused to believe and listen to John the Baptist, and now you are challenging my authority, knowing who I am, but refuse to believe me, and therefore you refuse to do the will of God. You will be shown the way by the very ones whom you consider beneath you.

### **3. Conclusion:**

“What do you think?” is the question Jesus asked these religious leaders, knowing what was going on in their minds and in their hearts. He was not going to entertain their interrogation about His authority. He wanted them to reveal their own thoughts and the things that went on in their hearts, their intentions and lack of openness for the work of God through others, such as John the Baptist and He, Jesus, the Christ.

Today, Christ is asking a similar question to us as leaders and volunteers serving God and our congregation and our community, “What do you think”? He is waiting for the answer we will give Him. Did you say yes, and did not go, or did you say no and went? What are the feelings you have inside? What is going on in your minds and hearts as you are serving Me and your congregation and your community? What is there inside of you that needs to be transformed? The path of righteousness is a path of repentance of things that hinder good relationships with

Me and those around you. Do not feel threatened by others who are My children too. Be at peace and be on the path of righteousness. That is what the Kingdom of Heaven is all about. It is about all of us belonging to God and serving God as One. May God help us all to answer these questions with hearts and minds that are focused on the things that matter to God. May God help us to behave and act according to the will of God. Amen