



Sermon for the Twenty-First Sunday after Pentecost, Oct. 2020.

What do You Think?

St. Luke's Episcopal Church, Coeur d'Alene The Rev. Glenda Empsall

[Deuteronomy 34:1-12](#), [Psalm 90:1-6, 13-17](#), [1 Thessalonians 2:1-8](#), [Matthew 22:34-46](#)

May the graciousness of the Lord our God be upon us, and the Holy Spirit meet us where we are; giving us courage to speak in love, and grace to hear truth; so that we may live in harmony with our neighbors.

Back in the day, do you remember watching television series that began with a synopsis of what had happened so far and always ended with a cliff hanger that compelled you to “tune in next week?” I think the trajectory of Jesus’ public ministry through the lens of the Gospel according to Matthew would make an action-packed TV series. Jesus does something provocative. The crowds love it; the powers-that be? not so much. The establishment confronts Jesus, but he will not be deterred. Jesus uses scripture and their own words to confound them, and that infuriates them. They plot to have Jesus arrested and killed.

It could begin with Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem humbly riding on a donkey as the crowds shouted “Hosanna to the Son of David!” Include how he overturned the tables and expelled the money changers from the temple. Then, equally outrageous, there, in the temple, how Jesus healed the blind and the lame. The priests and the scribes heard the shouts of praise; saw the people who did not belong in the temple and angrily rebuked Jesus, “Do you hear what these are saying?” Jesus responded by quoting from Psalm 8, “Out of the mouths of infants and nursing babies you have prepared praise for yourself.”

The following day, Jesus returned to the temple; to the scene of his crimes, where he was met by the chief priests and elders, members of the Sanhedrin. This was akin to being confronted by the Supreme Court of that day. “By what authority are you doing these things? And who gave you this authority?” Clearly they had not authorized any of it!

Jesus agreed to answer their questions if they first answered his, “Did John’s baptism come from heaven, or from men?” No matter which way they answered, they would be in trouble with the crowd, so they said the unthinkable, “We do not know.”

Jesus then told two parables. The first about a father who asked his sons to work in the vineyard. One said he would not go, but changed his mind and went. The second said he would go, but didn’t. Jesus asked, “Which of the two did the father’s will?”

The learned men gave the obvious answer, “The first.” Jesus said to them, “The tax collectors and prostitutes will enter the kingdom of God before you because John came to you in the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him. But the tax collectors and prostitutes believed him. And even when you saw how their lives were changed, you did not repent and believe John.”

The chief priests and elders were not prepared for Jesus’ next Parable about tenants who beat or killed everyone who tried to collect the rent, finally murdering the landowner’s son. Jesus asked, “What will the landowner do?” and they answered, “He will destroy those evil men and lease the land to others who will give him his produce.” Jesus responded with verses from Psalm 118, about the rejected stone that became the keystone, concluding “The kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to people that produce the fruits of the kingdom.” They realized that Jesus had been speaking about them.

The next attempt to discredit Jesus was by the disciples of the Pharisees joined by the Herodians, a political faction supporting Antipas, son of Herod the Great. These groups were united only by their opposition to Jesus. They asked, "Is it lawful to pay taxes to the Emperor?" Jesus called them hypocrites, asked for a coin, examined it and said, "Whose image and inscription is here?" They said, "Caesar's." [image = Tiberius, son of Augustus; inscription = "Son of God."] Jesus answered, "Give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar, and give to God what is God's." [everything] When they heard this, they were amazed, and went away.

The same day, Jesus was confronted by the Sadducees, priests who served exclusively in the Temple and did not believe in the resurrection. They asked what would happen in the resurrection if a woman died after having been married and widowed seven times. "Whose wife will she be?" Jesus answered, "You don't know the scriptures or the power of God. ... Haven't you read what was spoken to you by God: 'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob?' God is not the God of the dead, but the God of the living." And the crowds were astonished at his teaching.

Finally, we come to the Gospel lesson for today. The Pharisees heard that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, so one of them, a lawyer, asked, "Which commandment in the law is the greatest?" Jesus' answer came from the heart of Judaism; a frequently recited prayer, the Shema, [Deuteronomy 6:5] "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind." This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second [Leviticus 19:18] is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets."

Then Jesus asked them a much harder question: "What do you think of the Messiah? Whose son is he?" They said, "The son of David." Jesus' response is from Psalm 110, which the Pharisees knew well; and, for our edification, it is also quoted in Mark [12:35-37], Luke [20:41-44] and Acts [2:29-36]. "How is it then that David by the Spirit calls him Lord?" 'The Lord said to my Lord, "Sit at my right hand, until I put your enemies under your feet"'? If David calls him Lord, how can he be his son?" No one was able to give him an answer, nor from that day did anyone dare to ask him any more questions.

Once a week, for 30 minutes, I enjoy Zooming with a group of folks for something called 'Lectio.' It is an ancient way of thinking about scripture. We use the Gospel for the coming Sunday; read it, pause to reflect, read it again, reflect, and break into small groups to discuss. For each reflection time, we ask 3 ourself questions: "What catches your attention in this text? What questions does this text raise for you? What do you think God might be saying to you through this text?" No previous experience needed!

+Gretchen says that, once you preach a sermon, it is no longer yours. People hear and 'inwardly digest' the words in different ways, within their own context. There is a quote attributed to Alan Greenspan, "I know that you believe that you think you understand what you thought you heard me say, but what you don't realize is that what you heard is not what I meant." For me, that is the scary part of recording and publishing a written sermon. You are invited to ask questions. Understand that I may not have answers!

In the Way of Love; Turn, Learn, Pray, Worship, Bless, Go, Rest.

And be sure to tune in next week!