

September 27, 2020 17th Sunday after Pentecost



St. John United Church of Christ

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Fairview Heights, IL

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SECRETARY – JUDY HARTMANN

Rev. Rosemary Captain 660-8894

Prayers and Liturgy by Rev. Kaji S. Douša.

ORGANIST – SHARON BANJAVCIC

ENVIRONMENTAL ARTS –

CAROL BULVA AND NANCY EISENHAUER

In the Name of Jesus...

Lectionary Texts:

*Exodus 17:1-7, Psalm 78:1-4, 12-16,
Philippians 2:1-13, Matthew 21:23-32*

*OPENING WORDS: Psalm 146:5-7 NRSV
“Happy are those whose help is the God of Jacob,
Whose hope is in the Lord their God,
Who made heaven and earth,
The sea, and all that is in them;
Who keeps faith forever;
Who executes justice for the oppressed;
Who gives food to the hungry.”*

*RESPONSIVE CALL TO WORSHIP:

Watch and listen for the wonders of our God.

Our God is among us.

Watch and listen for the goodness of our God.

Our God moves among us.

Watch and listen, for God is here.

Our God dwells among us.

*UNISON PRAYER OF INVOCATION:

God, the encourager, God, the compassionate,

God, the merciful, holy, blessed:

Disturb us. Rouse us from our sleep.

Lift us into consciousness of your presence.

Change us, move us, mold us for the better;

So that, at the sound of your voice

**At the call of our name we will never be the same.
May this worship do this and so much more,
in the name of Jesus. Amen.**

SCRIPTURE: **Matthew 21:23-32**

²³ When Jesus entered the temple, the chief priests and elders of the people came to him as he was teaching. They asked, “What kind of authority do you have for doing these things? Who gave you this authority?”

²⁴ Jesus replied, “I have a question for you. If you tell me the answer, I’ll tell you what kind of authority I have to do these things. ²⁵ Where did John get his authority to baptize? Did he get it from heaven or from humans?”

They argued among themselves, “If we say ‘from heaven,’ he’ll say to us, ‘Then why didn’t you believe him?’ ²⁶ But we can’t say ‘from humans’ because we’re afraid of the crowd, since everyone thinks John was a prophet.” ²⁷ Then they replied, “We don’t know.”

Jesus also said to them, “Neither will I tell you what kind of authority I have to do these things.

Parable of two sons

²⁸ “What do you think? A man had two sons. Now he came to the first and said, ‘Son, go and work in the vineyard today.’

²⁹ “‘No, I don’t want to,’ he replied. But later he changed his mind and went.

³⁰ “The father said the same thing to the other son, who replied, ‘Yes, sir.’ But he didn’t go.

³¹ “Which one of these two did his father’s will?” They said, “The first one.”

Jesus said to them, “I assure you that tax collectors and prostitutes are entering God’s kingdom ahead of you. ³² For John came to you on the righteous road, and you didn’t believe him. But tax collectors and prostitutes believed him. Yet even after you saw this, you didn’t change your hearts and lives and you didn’t believe him.

SERMON: **“Jesus, Where’s Your Credentials?”**



Here’s my question: how do we come to believe anything?

Say for example your regular doctor is sending you to a specialist who you have never met before. You probably want to know something about this new doctor. Across your back-yard fence, you ask your neighbor what she thinks of this new doctor. You tell her the name of your new doctor. She says, “her name sounds funny. How do you pronounce it? What country is she from? I don’t know if I would trust her.”

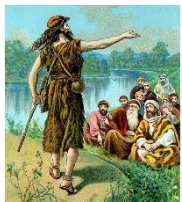
You also look up where the doctor went to school, how long she has been practicing and if she is Board Certified in her specialty. What are her credentials? You want to believe she’s a good doctor. You go to your first appointment and she tells you that you will die in 4 months. You don’t want to believe that. No one wants to believe bad

news. So you go to a different doctor to get a second opinion.

You start over checking credentials for this second doctor. The neighbor over the fence says, "Oh, this doctor is way over in West St. Louis. I don't know about him." You check where he went to school, how long he has been practicing and if he is Board Certified in his specialty. You want to believe he is a good doctor. At your appointment he tells you that you will live for a year.

So which doctor do you believe? Its easier to believe good or better, news. I guess if you live for 5 months, you believe the second doctor. Your belief is based on outcomes; on what happened, or what your experience was.

That's what I compare our scripture lesson to. The Chief Priests and Elders, who are supposed to be "Godly" people who know about heaven and hell, ask Jesus for his credentials. "By what authority does Jesus speak and teach?" Jesus asks them a question. "You answer this question and I will tell you where my authority comes from."



He asks them where did John the Baptist get his authority – from heaven or humans? These Temple experts huddle together. What do they believe? What will happen when they answer? What will the outcome be? If they say from heaven, Jesus will say then why didn't you believe him. If they answer from humans, the crowds standing around this

conversation will get very upset because those in the crowds believe that John the Baptist was a prophet. They didn't like either outcome, so they just say "we don't know." I guess they forgot to ask the neighbor across the fence.



Jesus replies, "then I won't tell you where my authority comes from. They probably wouldn't believe Jesus anyway. So, Jesus tell this parable. Which son does the father's will?"

So here comes the punch line. If tax collectors and prostitutes believe what Jesus says will enter God's Kingdom before these Temple experts. Jesus reminds them that John came to them on the righteous road and you didn't believe him. But the tax collectors and prostitutes did believe him. Yet, even after you saw this, you didn't change your hearts and lives and you didn't believe John.

These Chief Priests and Elders saw the outcome of John's words and baptizing but they didn't believe what they saw. Why not? Wasn't their own eye witness accounts proof enough? They didn't believe what they saw with their own eyes.

Did they need a second opinion? Did they talk to the crowds who followed Jesus as they witnessed the healings, exorcisms, and words of hope that Jesus offered them?

Who could verify the credentials of Jesus? The tax collectors and prostitutes; they had nothing to lose by believing. They had miraculous outcomes

from believing Jesus. Perhaps the temple people had everything to lose by believing. They wanted better outcomes from their beliefs. They wanted to keep their power that they had in the temple.

So now I ask you; what will it take for you to believe? And how would other people know you were a believer? Amen.

PASTORAL PRAYER: Beginning with a time of silent, personal prayer.

Majestic God, may your presence in the church be widely acknowledged as your people grow from strength to strength, from truth to truth, from loving to loving. Without your Spirit we are lifeless and barren. As we abide in Christ the vine, we bear much fruit to the glory of your name.

Bless all who invest themselves in your work through the church, sending cards to the sick and aged, maintaining the property, keeping accounts and paying the bills, making music, and doing fundraising through sewing masks.

Sovereign above all earthly leaders, hear our prayers for our country and all our elected officials that we may be led in ways of truth and justice. Bless all those in elected positions that they may care for the people they are governing.

Hear our prayers for those who are passing through times of anxiety, sleepless, restless, not knowing what to do. Grant them peace of mind as they put their trust in your daily care and keeping.

Heal the sick, strengthen the weak, comfort the sorrowful, send friends to the lonely.

We pray all these things in the name of your son, Jesus Christ . . .

THE LORD'S PRAYER:

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.

THANK YOU FOR SHARING:

God promises to hear the prayers asked in the name of Jesus. And God's people have asked. God's people have asked for support and resources, for direct aid, for money and food. They have asked in the name of Jesus. And in the name of Jesus, we respond.

Through this offering, we pool together the resources of every person gathered here, in the name of Jesus, who gives and saves and shows us the way. Let us give and save and show others Christ's way.

DOXOLOGY: (music only)

Praise God from whom all blessings flow;
Praise God, all creatures here below;
Praise God for all that love has done.
Creator, Christ, and Spirit, One. Amen.

(If there are names on this list that you believe can be removed, call the church secretary.)

UNISON PRAYER OF DEDICATION:

These gifts represent the best of ourselves, O God – we attest, with joy, that we can do no better.

Receive them with our prayers.

Take and use them for your goodness.

In the name of Jesus we pray. Amen.

RESPONSIVE BLESSING:

The sweet Spirit of God has blessed us!

Let us give thanks.

Thank you!

The great Spirit of God will guide us!

Let us give thanks.

Thank you!

The humble Spirit of God is with us.

Let us give thanks.

Thank you!

And may the blessed, eternal Trinity + grant you the peace the world cannot give, now and forever.

Amen.



ST. JOHN PRAYER LIST: Gene Ganschietz, Rich Schmitt, Nelson Libell, Dave Seneczyn, Eric White, Lori Riess, Charles Chamberlin, Donna Isselhard, Mitch Nallie, Candy Pearce, Greg Talley, Carol Meyer, Leah Williams, Pat Holtgrave, Jane Riess, Shari Hamilton, Charlotte Watson, Becky Ballard.