

**Synod-wide Worship**  
**Matthew 21:23-32**  
**17 Pentecost -Year A**  
**Bishop Amy Current**

So the question of the day is by what authority are you doing these things and who gave you this authority? The question is posed by the elders and the leaders of the temple.

Let's put this in perspective. Ever since Jesus met John the baptizer in the Jordan and was baptized anointed by the Holy Spirit and named by God the Father. "My son the beloved with you I am well pleased - He'd been loving God's people which are all the people so loving all of creation into God's promised kingdom.

John had already even before the day of the baptism in the Jordan been preparing the folks for it. He'd been recalling the words of the prophets like Isaiah saying things like this

- people get ready
  - the Messiah is coming
  - God's promise new creation is afoot
  - God is with us Emmanuel
  - the one who is saving us from our sin Jesus is coming is near
- 
- pay attention
  - wake up
  - stay alert
  - turn around

And many heard this good news with hope they sought out Jesus found healing and love and they were seen and welcomed and transformed and made new. Now the regular worshipers the council members the faithful elders were waiting for the Messiah – yes - they had read the news but frankly they were waiting for a Messiah who would blow in with might and power and order and set things right in the world. As they heard about Jesus "ministry" they observed chaos disorder breaking rules and an imposter stirring the pot.

Who can blame them?

Just in the last few days, Jesus' followers had shut down the streets of town as he then paraded through on a donkey while they shouted his praises from the street side. Jesus then entered the sacred temple space and turned over the tables of those folks who were collecting the offerings. And then he welcomed in the blind and the lame, and he cured them right there on the spot. And we here, echoes of Isaiah, the blind shall see and the lame will walk in God's promise praying to come. Yet the religious leaders, those who were held responsible for tending to the temple, feared an imposter.

The real question of the day was, do you Jesus believe you're the Messiah?

Truth be told, there had been imposters before. And in fact, if we're honest, there's still imposters now today. Imposters that try to make us believe that they are the ones, they are the savior of the

world, the ones who ask us to follow, to fall in line, that there is a new created order, right? But when truth comes to land in this earth, Jesus the Messiah always gives life. Jesus the Messiah is always offering mercy. Jesus the Messiah always lives embodied love, forgiveness, even to death on the cross.

God gave us God's son, so that all the world might be saved through him. This is about life, not condemnation, not getting things right, but through life, transformed by the mercy of God. Whether this makes us, or the elders and religious leaders comfortable or not, God is transforming the world with love. Through Jesus, through Jesus ministry, ministry, through Jesus' death, through Jesus' resurrection, and through the Spirit's power still today and tomorrow.

So by what authority did Jesus do these things? By the love of God set free in the world. Jesus is the love of God alive in the world. This is still true today. It was true yesterday. It was true at the beginning of creation, and it will be true in the promised world to come. And what we know and what we see, and what we hear in the stories is that the crowds see Jesus. The people on the margins were seen by Jesus, and they believed in Jesus.

The outsiders,  
the outcasts,  
the tax collectors,  
and the prostitutes that are used as an example here were met by Jesus' love and transformed in their brokenness to see in themselves what Jesus saw - what God created, what the Holy Spirit reminds us of every day. For we too are the broken ones. We too are the ones that do not see ourselves as worthy, but God does. Jesus, God sees us, beloved ones, full stop.

Named, claimed, forgiven, beloved, and set free!

Jesus, the Word made flesh, meets us, each one of us, and calls us by name, beloved child of God, you are mine. And in Jesus we are set free.

Truth be told, we like the elders in the temple, sometimes just can't make room in our lives for the chaos of love and forgiveness, a new world of peace and mercy. So we do our darndest to stick with the way we've always done things, sometimes losing sight of the promise. God, our Creator, is faithful in the midst of it. Jesus, our Savior, is consistent in the midst of it. And the Holy Spirit, thank God, is persistent,

even when we're suspicious,  
even when we are consumed by ourselves,  
even when we're terrified,  
even when we're doubtful,  
even when we're suffering.  
The Holy Spirit is persistent, even when we are broken, wide open.

And God meets us there. God meets us there, beloved ones, and breathes new life into us, turning us from inside ourselves back to God and one another, where we are beloved and set free to be loved by God and by one in the kingdom.

Did you catch that? In this gospel today, no one is left out. No one is left behind. No one is unworthy. Even the ones that are challenging Jesus have a promised place in the reign of God. There's room for all. Tax collectors and chief priests, elders and and prostitutes, you and even me. You, every one of you are beloved by what authority, by whose authority, only by God's authority, who promises to make all things new.

And this beloved ones is true today, this very minute. You have nothing more to prove. God has made you, loves you, just as you are. There's no reason to wait to believe this. There's no reason to wait or imagine you have to be something else. God has made you and loves you, transforms you, and sets you free from your brokenness, sets you free from anything that prevents you from seeing yourself as worthy and beloved. Don't wait until death or eternal life to experience this, but live love now. That's God's promise. That's God's gift to each one of us. It is God's authority that we all have the freedom and forgiveness to live loved.