

**Sermon, Proper , Year A**

**St. Paul's, Mt. Vernon**

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**September 27, 2020**

**Turn then, and live. If there is a one liner for today, that is it. Turn then, and live. The Gospel from Matthew today carries the same theme, asks the same, with all God has given you, in all the ways God has loved you, in knowing and living in all of that, how have you changed? Today, we gather together, and that alone is a gift, considering these hard times we have all had recently. It is a**

**joy to be together, and we come together to engage in sacramental acts, we gather to celebrate baptism, and confirmation, and reception. All of those are about change. All of them are transforming acts, meant to call the individuals who will inhabit them today, but truthfully all who witness them, be that in person, or virtually, to change, to turn.**

**Essentially all the readings we are given today point to this reality of life, this choice we have, to either follow the ways of the world, or maybe even the ways of our desire, the selfish things we want, or believe we need,**

**instead of following Jesus Way, the Divine way. That is always our choice.**

**Sacramental acts such as what we will participate in today, live out before our eyes, are entered into for just that purpose. We truly miss the point if we think of these things like some kind of magic, as in we will be magically changed by the priests act, or the bishop's act. Yes, these liturgies and sacraments have as their intention to enact for our eyes and ears, what we hope will happen, inside each of us, unseen and unknown. Additionally, we do these things, not for this moment alone, simply to gather**

**here, and pray, and then move on as we were before we entered this space, but to mark a change of direction, a turning for us all.**

**When we answer these vows, that is exactly what is intended, amendment of life, transformation of life.**

**As Matthew puts it so well today, we are called to look at all the spectacular things our God has done for us, and to live out of that gratitude and love**

**I want you to think on the fact that the writer of Matthew and the Matthean community**

**was living in a very similar time as now, as has been true in just about all of human existence on this planet, that being a world of much disparity, inequality, rich and poor.**

**The ruling elite were very much questioned, as to their legitimacy and to their intention.**

**Those who would truly be thought of as subjects in this world, the lowly we might say, know full well that the riches enjoyed by others, no matter what is said, comes at their expense, and at great cost.**

**the point here, the question for the people listening to Jesus that day, and for us today,**

**is where do we find our power? Where do we find our authority? In what or whom do we put our trust?**

**This parable, which makes the righteous son, the one who initially says no, but then afterwards goes and does what was asked after all. In a sense, Jesus here supports that old and veritable saying, Actions speak louder than words. It is cheap, simple, easy, to simply say the right things. More than one person along the way has suggested that even prayer, our prayers, are nothing more than hollow words, if when we get off our knees,**

**and open our eyes, we don't put one step in front of the other, to move toward enacting, in any way we can, that which we just prayed. I believe CS Lewis was right when he opined, "The prayers are not for God, they are for us." I would concur. You and I can pray all day for peace, but if we don't get off our knees, open our eyes, and even get off our butts, and do something, they are shallow prayers indeed, nothing more than words.**

**In this parable, Jesus is really putting forth his idea on what it means to believe.**

**Believing means we actually, each one of us,**

**has to change. It means making a decision about what power is legitimate to us, the power of this world, or the power of God.**

**Jesus is asking us, almost requiring us, to make a decision about what source of power we are going to pledge allegiance to, and ultimately follow, and then seeing to it that we act out of that decision, every day, and in every way.**

**Actually, there are so many powers vying for our allegiance in this world, coming from all sorts of angles, money, power, escape, denial. Jesus is asking us to trust his power, and to**

**live out of that power. He is asking us to change, to turn, and to live.**

**All those stepping forward today for baptism, confirmation, reception, are going to stand here and recite words. I think they are powerful words. We, all of us present, and even those watching virtually, are going to recite the baptismal covenant, which I think is one of the most radical human documents ever produced. But, I want to qualify that today. I believe it is one of the most radical human documents ever produced, but like any collection of words, no matter how**

**eloquent and moving, they mean nothing, if they don't change us. They are hollow and worthless if they do not make us turn, and live, and to live differently.**

**So, I say to all of you stepping forward, right now, think and pray carefully. These vows you will take in just a few moments are more than just words. They are a call to action, a call to movement, a call on you, to turn, and live. And to all who witness these vows today, they are equally a call on all of us, to do the same. After seeing all that God has done for us, the way God loves us, for all the**

**dreams God has for us, we come to moments like this one, today are the words, the acts, the prayers, but they mean little if they don't turn to actions today, tomorrow, and all the rest of our lives. Actions speak louder than words. Decide today how you will change, then indeed, I leave you with the words given to our ancient forbears, more than that the plea made by our God, to each and everyone of us, turn, and live.**

**My beloved, I have said these words to you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.**