

27 September 2020: Matthew 21:28-32 (Proper 21)

Have you ever known a killjoy? Here are some synonyms for killjoy: spoilsport, sourpuss, party pooper, wet blanket, grump, complainer, grouch, whiner, moaner, grumbler, faultfinder, nitpicker, stick-in-the-mud, stuffed shirt, fussbudget. Quite a list! and each one could be used to describe Jesus' opponents. In literature and film, killjoys are often comic, pathetic, or annoying characters. Jesus' killjoys are deadly earnest.

Jesus tells the story of two sons: With the first, he is asked to do his chores; he initially refuses, then has a change of heart and does what the father asks. The second says yes, but his obedience turns into antagonistic refusal.

They had asked Jesus what gave him the authority to do what he was doing. He asks them about John the Baptist's ministry. This is not just a clever escape from their trap. If they could not recognize and delight in John the Baptist's authority, how could they see and celebrate God's authority in the one to whom John pointed? In the parable Jesus tells them that true authority comes from doing the will of the Father. Talk, promises, good intentions without action are useless. John the Baptist had true authority because he did the will of the Father; Jesus has true authority because he both does and is the will of the Father. The lowest of the low who surrender their former malicious ways and respond to God's loving-kindness also have authority, authority to enter the Kingdom of heaven. Jesus' enemies will use their authority to destroy Jesus, who is doing the works of God. They are bent on killing joy—the joy of God at work in the world.

Jesus says to them: *For 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 after you saw it, you did not change your minds and believe in him.* When asked about his authority Jesus did not cite his many healings, miracles, or teachings. No, he reminded them of changed lives. Whatever joy his enemies saw, they wanted to kill.

There has been much thought, and talk, about the Church's future; often it seems the motivation is fear. Often the focus is on tactics—what we do: what programs, changes will bring people in? How can we advertise better? Perhaps strategy is more important. Strategy is about objectives—what we are aiming for. Doing things without knowing why we are doing them, or for joyless objectives, is useless.

Assuming we do not want to be like Jesus' opponents: our strategy is to see and celebrate God at work in the world, in our lives and in the lives of others. It appears from the volumes of research into what makes a congregation healthy and inviting that this is just what people are looking for: evidence of God at work in the lives of people, and the response of joy.

Evangelism is not about convincing others to believe in God or promoting a particular church as just what they need. Evangelism is about seeing and celebrating God at work in the world, sharing the sure truth that God is working in our lives, and can and will work in their lives, too; the unshakable conviction that God's love can and will overcome obstacles, that there is no one whose past disqualifies; that we are all broken, wounded and in need of healing, and we are finding healing, strength and hope from God, here at Calvary Church together; that our lives are being changed in wondrous ways. Evangelism begins with joy, adoration, praise, and thanksgiving. Christian joy is love for God lived; the conviction that with God all things are possible, that in God's eyes no one is irredeemable. And it is always personal: you and I are the living proof, the only proof we have.

What people want to know from you personally is why God is important to you; they are not seeking definitions or just the right program; they want to see God at work in you. We need not 'tell our stories' to anyone—although there is a place for that, without melodrama and egomania. Obedience urges that we simply live our responding love for God because God is at work in us and around us, and we cannot live disobediently. As Jesus burst from the three-day tomb, He is ready and anxious to burst forth in you. Just let it happen. Fall into His awesome love; be obedient to His transforming love: this is God's deepest, eternal desire for you. Your past disobedience means nothing; today do the will of the Father.

Blessing and honor, thanksgiving and praise, more than we can offer, more than we can conceive, be yours, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, by all angels, all mortals, all creatures, for ever and ever. Amen.