



Free Evangelical
Lutheran Synod
in South Africa

Sermon for the Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost 2017

The Authority of Christ is revealed!



St. John's Lutheran Parish
Shelly Beach

• The Word of God for this Sermon is written in Mt 21, 23-32:

• ²³ And when he entered the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came up to him as he was teaching, and said, "By what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?"

• ²⁴ Jesus answered them, "I also will ask you one question, and if you tell me the answer, then I also will tell you by what authority I do these things.

• ²⁵ The baptism of John, from where did it come? From heaven or from man?" And they discussed it among themselves, saying, "If we say, 'From heaven,' he will say to us, 'Why then did you not believe him?'

• ²⁶ But if we say, 'From man,' we are afraid of the crowd, for they all hold that John was a prophet."

• ²⁷ So they answered Jesus, "We do not know." And he said to them, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things.

• ²⁸ "What do you think? A man had two sons. And he went to the first and said, 'Son, go and work in the vineyard today.'

• ²⁹ And he answered, 'I will not,' but afterwards he changed his mind and went.

• ³⁰ And he went to the other son and said the same. And he answered, 'I go, sir,' but did not go.

• ³¹ Which of the two did the will of his father?" They said, "The first." Jesus said to them, "Truly, I say to you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes go into the kingdom of God before you.

• ³² For John came to you in the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes believed him. And even when you saw it, you did not afterwards change your minds and believe him.

• Let us pray: *Come Holy Spirit, open our ears and our hearts so that we will become steadfast believers in Christ, who is our anointed Saviour and confess Him before people. Amen.*

• **Dear Beloved of God!**

• Jesus versus the chief priests and the elders of the people! In the temple, while Jesus was teaching. They burst into Jesus' teaching in the temple and challenged Him right there in front of the worshippers! They put Him on the spot. 'Tell us, once and for all, where do you take your authority from? Who gives you the right to cleanse the temple, to burst into our lives and do the things you have been doing?'

• The debate was opened, it seemed. What would Jesus answer them? Jesus responded with a question [25]: *"The baptism of John, from where did it come?"*

From heaven or from man?" Jesus pointed them towards His baptism, of all things. This puts a lot of weight on what happened that day, with the baptism of Jesus.

• For the enemies of Christ, this fenced them in. They couldn't answer Him, because whatever answer they would give would land them in trouble. If they affirmed that John's baptism was from God, then the question about Jesus' authority would have been resolved. Then Jesus' baptism would be the sign from God that He authorised Jesus! If they said "no, John's baptism was not from God" then they would lose face amongst the nation, because the nation believed that John was a genuine prophet sent by God!

• So, what did they do? They opted for the agnostic route, namely, 'we don't know'. A very popular route even in our days. Jesus replied [27b]: *"Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things."*

• So, who won this debate between the agnostics and Jesus? Jesus boxed them in and then left them. Unbelief cannot be conquered by debate. You cannot reason someone into faith. The best you can do is to corner them so that they have to consider who Jesus really is. And this means, for us in our times, that we will lead agnostics to go and consider what is written in the Scriptures of Jesus.

• Unbelief is an act of refusing to see what is revealed by the Word of God, Unbelief is being in denial of what is clearly revealed to us, by the Word of God. So, its not that the evidence is missing. Its right there in front of them, but they refuse to acknowledge even what they see and know.

• Now we have to remember, that we have an agnostic sitting right in our own hearts too, our old Adam! And for this reason, let us consider the answer of Jesus in detail.

• It is significant, that Jesus is willing to answer this question. It is amazing in the first place that God had so much foresight to make provision for the act of giving His authority to Jesus in, with and under the Baptism, through John. Jesus didn't just storm the temple on His own. He submitted Himself under the legal and authorised way of God. He was ordained for His ministry. He followed the orders of His Father. Jesus submitted Himself under the act of a human being, which was commanded by God. Jesus submitted Himself under the authority of the existing church, under its prophet John!

• Jesus was no rebel. He was not a revolutionary. He was not going His own way! Revolutionaries of many times have tried to utilise Jesus for their causes. Its not true. One cannot do it. He submitted Himself under the orders of His Father.

• The human being, John the Baptist, applied water to Jesus. Then something like a

dove descended on Jesus and a voice was heard in understandable language- [17] *“this is my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased”*. That is what the eye saw and the ear heard. However, there was more that was going on, far more: It was the baptism to fulfil all righteousness, says Jesus. It was the Holy Spirit who came down on Jesus like a dove. It was God the Father who was speaking those words.

•What we have here is an Epiphany of the Trinity! A Self-Revelation of God in, with and under means of the first creation!

•In, with and under the commanded act of an ordained human being God works! In, with, and under the means of the first creation, applied in God’s commanded way, together with the Word of God, the Holy Spirit is at work- the Trinity is in action! That is what has come to be known as a sacrament, which is derived from the word ‘mystery’. And it remains a mystery, that God in human form, 100% human and 100% God, becomes the Spirit bearer amongst Israel to suffer and to die on Golgotha, to carry away the sins of the world, to fulfil all righteousness! God becomes 100% involved in saving us from our sins, in history! One can say: He gets so deeply involved that He is actually hidden from the gazing of our old Adam who searches for God in the spectacular.

•In this regard I heard a question the other day, asking, but why is God so concerned about me and my sins. He is such a magnificent, almighty God of the universe. Why does He bother with such petty things as me and my sins? Why did He need to go to such depths to accomplish all of this? The OT Reading gives the answer: God says, [Eze 18.4] *“Behold, all souls are mine; the soul of the father as well as the soul of the son is mine: the soul who sins shall die.”* That is the reason. He is our Creator. Remember, we live from His breath. More, He is our loving Father, who does not shrug off His responsibility for us.

•He blesses the poor in the spirit. He comforts the mourning. He associates with the lowly. He is doing the right thing, although we have fallen into trouble, into deception from a fallen angel. We have become rebellious by nature, rebelling against Him. That caused us to become blind for His goodness! We don’t recognise His works as such, nor do we by nature acknowledge His divine goodness! In fact, we only tend to see our world with myself in the centre of it all!

•The soul who sins must die! What for? Because the soul which sins defiles itself and such a soul cannot remain God’s possession, because God is holy! And whoever is separated from God is separated from Life in the true sense.

•And we need to realise what this means: In the debate staged on TV and Internet between the two professors of Oxford university in England, Lennox and Dawkins, Lennox arguing for faith and science whilst Dawkins basically argued for science

only, against the possibility of the existence of God. In this debate it was Dawkins who admitted that a universe without a heavenly Father was terribly cold, dark and without purpose. But he said, they don't need God because science can give a mechanical explanation for everything they can measure in the universe. For him there is no gap in the functionality for God any-more.

- It was actually a heart-breaking moment, where the atheist basically shed his heart- one could sense a longing for what the other person had, but he was stuck in functionality only.

- This is what hell must be like- a world without a loving Father-Creator is terribly cold, it can be highly functional, but where is the joy and the beauty, where is thanksgiving, where are relationships, warm relationships, in summary we can ask, where is the kind of Love God reveals in Jesus ministry? There is no rest in such a place- purely functional, work, work, work- the moment you stop and think, the coldness drives you to get busy again. Is this why our societies are more and more working seven days a week? We need a time-out to be, who we are! We are not just functional. We have a being.

- Therefore, because God is Love, He has no pleasure in the cold death of anyone. Therefore, He made provision in, with and through Christ's ministry to give us a new heart and a new spirit through whom we believe and realise who He is and what He does. That is why He came and revealed Himself, in three persons, revealing their united love for one another and also for us, sinners. As we are united with this God, with His being and His work, gives the whole universe a new face for us, a new warmth, a new being and function.

- And now it is also understandable, why a soul that has no sense of love, no sense of being united with Love Himself, and refuses to be united with Him, cannot participate in Him. Such a soul chooses to die a cold functional death, alone.

- Yet, the soul who hears what the Lord says will henceforth be and do everything united with God. Even science will be done, not to get rid of God, but out of love for God's creation, to nurture it and to preserve as far as possible what He has created with love, beauty and joy in mind. And such a soul would even be prepared to suffer at length for the witness of God's true being and work. That is, even suffering can be transformed into revealing the beautiful and unmeasurable depth of God's Love. God's holiness is His absolute pure Love!

- And it is for you, reaching out to you, to make you holy as He is! This is a most certainly true. **Amen.**

- *The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen. (2 Cor 13, 14).*