

## *Mind & Body - Part Two*

**Philippians 2:2-5** make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind.<sup>3</sup> Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves.<sup>4</sup> Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others.<sup>5</sup> Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus.

**Matthew 21:28-32** "What do you think? A man had two sons; he went to the first and said, 'Son, go and work in the vineyard today.'<sup>29</sup> He answered, 'I will not'; but later he changed his mind and went.<sup>30</sup> The father went to the second and said the same; and he answered, 'I go, sir'; but he did not go.<sup>31</sup> Which of the two did the will of his father?" They said, "The first." Jesus said to them, "Truly I tell you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are going into the kingdom of God ahead of you.<sup>32</sup> 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 after you saw it, you did not change your minds and believe him.

## *Mind & Body - Part Two*

A few weeks ago we looked at a text from the second chapter of Philippians. There was a companion passage from the gospel of Matthew, but there wasn't time to explore it. Today, let's finish looking at these two texts. Just to review the lessons in the Philippians text, let me go over some of the major points. The over-arching concept that the apostle Paul is teaching here is that we need to live our lives in a manner that is worthy of the gospel of Christ. Jesus showed us the path; he showed us The Way. Our task as disciples is to follow in his footsteps. Paul pointed out that this is something that we do together as a community - supporting, encouraging, and guiding each other on our journey of life lived in faith.

Paul urged us to be of the same mind as Jesus, to have the same attitude and orientation as Christ. Then Paul pointed out that God exulted and vindicated Jesus because of his humility –humility expressed in self-denying service to others. We tend to think of salvation as a trophy awarded us for the life we live. We forget that we can experience a life of salvation as a community. A community walking on the path that Jesus walked. Jesus led the way. If Jesus could humble himself, then so can we! This humility, this humble way of way of living with our attention focused on others is central. This is where our minds need to be. There's the mind part of the sermon title, but what about the body in the sermon title?

In Matthew, just before today's scripture, Jesus was teaching in the temple, when the chief priests and other religious leaders approached him. They asked him, where was his authority for his teachings. Jesus said, "I'll answer your question if you answer mine. Did John the Baptist get his authority for his teaching from God or from man?" That stopped the religious officials in their tracks. They knew if they said, John the Baptist only had human authority, then the public would be mad at them because the people believed he had been God's prophet. But if they said that John the Baptist preached God's message, then people would ask, "Then why didn't you believe him? Jesus not only outwitted the religious leaders, he unveiled their motives and priorities. They aren't really concerned about his authority nearly as much as they are with maintaining their privilege and power.

In today's passage, Jesus points out that the tax collectors and harlots believed John. They didn't believe in John, but they believed his message. The racketeers and prostitutes understood John's message and they responded to it. John told them to repent, to turn and go in a better direction. One example that John used was "Whoever has two coats must share with anyone who has none; and whoever has food must do likewise." (Luke 3:11 NRS) The racketeers and whores were outside the law. They were often associated with the camps of the Roman soldiers. They certainly didn't look much like God's people, especially compared to pious religious leaders. Jesus said that even after the religious

leaders saw how the people believed John's teaching and turned their lives around, the temple officials still refused to hear and accept John. They resisted John's message. And so, those who were first (these religious leaders) became last, and the last (tax collectors and prostitutes) became first.

Jesus told them a short story of a man and his two sons. The father told each of his two sons to go work in the vineyard. One said he would go, but then didn't. The other refused to go, but later went. This story loses some of its power because we don't live in the culture of first century Judea. We may be used to adolescent sass. Kids who say "I will," but don't, are almost normal today. Those who defiantly refuse, but come through grudgingly later on are common, as well. But in the patriarchal society of the first century defiance was absolutely and totally unacceptable. To tell a father "No" was scandalous. Disobedience was equally offensive. One son has disobeyed his father. The other son has been disrespectful to his father.

An audience in Jesus' day would have had a hard time deciding between honor and obedience.<sup>1</sup> In that day and time, the fundamental issue would have been honor and shame – and **both** sons **shamed** their father. The second son was respectful of his father's honor, at least to his face - but then was disobedient. He reminds us of all of those who declare loyalty to God, who praise Jesus, but their lives are poor in love, compassion, and humility. They talk the God talk, but they fail to walk the Jesus walk. There was no good son in this story to those who heard Jesus tell it that day – until Jesus focused the question on "Who did his father's will?" Jesus isn't concerned with honor, but with action.

The second son said, "I go, Sir." It's interesting that the word *kyrie* is translated as "Sir." Back in Matthew 7:21, the word *kyrie* is translated as "Lord." "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven." In that passage, as well, Jesus cares more about action than lip service. The point is **not** that good works earn us divine rewards. The point isn't that we need to pile up holy "atta boy" certificates to have God's approval. **No**, Jesus is saying that our actions reveal our actual attitude more than our words do. As James expressed it in his letter, "I by my works will show you my faith." Speech without deeds is useless.

Those temple officials who confronted Jesus were focused on maintaining the status quo and their position of authority. There are other pitfalls. Church leaders can also be less spiritually perceptive than the people they're supposed to be leading. Even after people responded to John the Baptist, the temple officials failed to see God at work in John's ministry. Sometimes, religious leaders claim to be obedient to God, and that may well be what they're trying to do, but they're blind to any possibility that God may be doing a new thing. Even though **we** know that we're the priesthood of all believers, it's easy for **us** to settle into ruts of habit and be blind to the new things God is doing. We degenerate into a point where "church work" is nothing more than maintaining the institution of the church. We say that we're going into the vineyard to work, but instead of harvesting grapes, we spend all of our time building fences and rearranging the flagstones on the pathway. We need to respond in faith to the new things God is doing. It's far too easy to let "church work" deteriorate into little more than maintaining the institution, with little recognition or excitement for what God's active grace is doing and where it seeks to lead us.

Those who heard Jesus tell this story of the two sons condemned both boys – one for his words and one for his actions. Both boys shamed their father in that culture. This parable of the two sons calls us to look at our attitudes and assumptions. Just as those temple leaders should have had an open mind about the new thing that John the Baptist was doing, so we need to look at what we feel about new ideas, changes in worship, and how we feel when the furniture is moved.

This story also calls us to think about how we're living our faith. In the opening scene of the movie *La Dolce Vita*, a large statue of Christ, suspended below a helicopter, floats over city slums, over trash and litter, and over faces of people drowning in despair and depression, until it reaches its destination atop a church steeple. Do we put Christ on a pedestal while passing over the very people he served most often? Have we professed our faith but avoided the service that it entails? As the church,

are we actually showing up for work? Are we doing the peacemaking, mercy-granting, justice-seeking kinds of work of the kingdom of heaven?

True righteousness is in the doing, not in the confessing. Our actions speak louder than our words. Our acts of mercy tell what we believe far more clearly than anything we say. When someone asks you what you believe, tell them what you do. When they ask, "What does your church believe?" tell them of all the wonderful things this congregation does. Our level of gratitude for all of God's blessings will be shown by our generosity on our pledge cards. Our thanksgiving for the bounty of the harvest will be reflected, not in the meal we eat on Thanksgiving Day, but in the feast we serve at the Meal of Grace at CCM. Everywhere we look with open hearts there is new wisdom to learn from scripture, and new opportunities to serve with humility. Mind and body, aligned and working together, and yoked with other Christians in the body of Christ – this is what we are called to be and do. All glory to God alone! Amen.

James 2:14-19 NRS <sup>14</sup> What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but do not have works? Can faith save you? If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill," and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead. But someone will say, "You have faith and I have works." Show me your faith apart from your works, and I by my works will show you my faith. You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe - and shudder.

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<sup>1</sup> David Buttrick, *Speaking Parables* (Louisville, Westminster John Knox, 2000) p 120