

092720 Putting Feet to Faith Matthew 21 28 32

During the Revolutionary War a young man is reported to have come to George Washington and said, “General Washington, I want you to know that I believe in you and your cause. I fully support you.”

Washington graciously thanked him and asked the young man, “What regiment are you in? Under whose command do you serve? What uniform do you wear?”

The young man answered, “Oh, I’m not in the army. I’m just a civilian.”

The general replied, “Young man, if you believe in me and my cause, then you join the army. You put on a uniform. You get yourself a rifle and you fight.”  
(*Dynamic Preaching*, I July/August/September, 2014, p. 66).

And that is what Jesus calls us to do...step up ... get into the fray.

And put feet to our faith...repeat

In today’s story, we see Jesus during Holy week... he’s ridden into Jerusalem on the donkey.....fulfilling prophecies and the crowds are crying Hosanna....he is healing... he is preaching ... he is performing miracles...and the religious leaders of the day are nervous. Here they are trying to maintain the faith... trying to keep all the rules and regs.... Then this upstart ...reengage Jesus

comes along. Jesus comes along with fewer rules and fewer words And words that don't even talk about the rules... but they are words that speak of life. Jesus comes along and offers life-giving words... he comes telling stories and doing good deeds

While the Pharisees are discussing doctrines and beliefs and who has what kind of authority and where does Jesus think he gets HIS authority????but Jesus sidesteps those questions and tells them a simple story that is bound to confuse and confound and baffle and perplex those who thought THEY were the ones with the authority.

He says "Picture 2 sons, the dad tells on elder son to go to the vineyards and tie up grapes... the elder son says,...I don't want to." Now in Greek its' not so much NO, I won't do it as much as "No, I really don't care to."

Now we have to remember that this would be a terrible affront to a Middle Eastern father, and all of Jesus' listeners would have know that. It would be a terrible insult for a son to respond to this father this way. Honor is at stake.... And this would be a shaming and humiliating thing for this parent to be told publically, "no way, Dad."

So this was more than just a suburban boy whining about yard work; his was a grave slap in the face to one deserving of respect.

The story continues... then the dad goes to the second son and tells him to go to the vineyard and also tie up grapes...the second son dutifully responds... "I'm right on it!"... now that's more like it.... That's the expected and respectful response. So far... the second son is way ahead.

But we remember, don't we that this is a Jesus story... there is more to come...and there is always a twist...the first son, the whining dishonorable son, finally after some grousing, grabs this coat and plods out to the vineyard to tie up the grapes. We don't know why... but he does... maybe he felt bad for the way he treated his father ... and he knows his father needs help.

Now the 2<sup>nd</sup> son gets distracted, gets busy, or maybe even never planned to do what his father asked in the first place.... Just says he will to keep his father off his back. But he never goes out to the vineyard and he never ties a single grape vine.

Jesus asks: Which one did what his father asked? Which one did the will of his father.

The chief priests look at one another and mumble< "Darn... how do I answer that? Because the answer is, of course, neither...one was disrespectful and the other other lied.... Yet which one actually does it?

In our parable, Jesus asks the Pharisees who is really the faithful son? Who really answers God's call? Of course it was the son who initially said no... but

later had a change of heart... those who really got what Jesus was saying... really began to understand Jesus message of God's love to all.

And without saying, much more... the religious leaders.. the Pharisees see the finger of righteousness being pointed at them for they were the second son who said, they go to work in the fields of God but never did what they said they would... they said they'd follow God.. but then.... They didn't.... they didn't ...care for the poor... they didn't welcome all people... they didn't treat people fairly... they didn't love others and care for them as religious leaders were called to do. Pause

Well .... This story was not an easy thing for the religious faithful in Jesus time to hear .... And.... It's not an easy thing for us to hear either

Perhaps like all of us... the religious leaders.... They feared losing their prestige, their power...their wealth... their status was at stake.

Yet.... It was the outcasts who got it... those who the religious leaders looked down their noses at.. the poor..the lepers.. the unclean...those outside the established religion....they got who Jesus us and they were willing to follow them

And doesn't that happen today...just look around us... when our way of being is challenged... we like the Pharisees.... We want to dig in our heels and protect our privilege and we do not take kindly to anyone who challenges us...who

challenges our position and attempts to make changes that would threaten us.. that would challenge us.

We see that in our government...in the streets and in the country.

Our passage today calls us all to us our gifts and positions in life to serve others. Our passage today calls us all to use our gifts... our positions in life to serve others.

Jesus reminds us that we exist for the sake of welcoming and serving God's people. This is the mark of the authority Jesus.

Just as Jesus reminds the religious leaders of his day,... Jesus reminds us ...our passage today calls us all to welcome and serve all of God's people. This is the mark of the authority Jesus brings and should be the mark of all our leaders...all of us... It is not status...it calls us to say yes even the initially, we may balk... we may say no. yet are beckoned .... We are called to say yes to God's call.... To use our gifts and positions for others.... To serve others...we exist for the sake of welcoming and serving God's peoples....REPEAT

This is the mark of authority that Jesus brings. There are the ways we called to go and work in the vineyard of God's kingdom. The heart of the Christian faith is not about our status in life... or about finding spiritual satisfaction, or about

accumulating great wealth and power. Rather it is the life we have Christ, a life lived in the service of others and a life lived in love.

Sometimes it is the “outsider” those outside our faith who more easily catch on to this whole grace and gratitude thing....and live out their lives .... Like the second son.... By changing their minds and coming to faith.

In her book, *Mountains Beyond Mountains*, Tracy Kiidder tells the story of Dr. Paul Farmer a infectious disease specialist and professor from Harvard who devoted his life to serving the poor in Haiti....both with his money and his time. But he got very frustrated with politicians, physicians and clergy who talk a lot about the poor and their needs but never really engage in working along side them... Dr. Farmer calls us... just as Jesus calls us to not just talk the talk but walk the talk.

God calls us not only to say yes but to go into God’s fields to work

Remember that at the very end of the gospel.... Jesus last words to us... the last thing he says and does with his disciples is to send them out ... to give them the authority to go out in the world to teach, to baptize and to live the way of Jesus...And in the same manner that’s exactly what Jesus does to us. He calls us to go work in the vineyard alongside of the most motley group of disciples, and all sorts and kinds of people... even those we’d find a bit questionable...(Ibid., 67).

He calls us to respond with yes and with enthusiasm. J

Jesus is saying.. if you love me show me... do what I call you to. If you love me, follow me....which means more than nod our heads...and the Bible tells us how it's done... the prophets said it repeatedly:

Care for the poor, the widow, the orphan... feed the hungry... clothe the needy and give water to the thirsty.. shelter to the homeless...to love the lord your God with all your heart and minds and soul and to love your neighbors... even those you don't much like... to love them as yourselves...that requires engaging our hearts and souls .. our intelligence... whatever physical strength we have doing that.

There is a wonderful Danish Story..Ducks Are Made to Fly

Soren Kierkegaard, he Danish theologian & philosopher, told this parable, which he called "The Wild Duck of Denmark." "A wild duck was flying northward with his mates across Europe during the springtime. En route, he happened to land in a barnyard in Denmark, where he quickly made friends with the tame ducks that lived there. The wild duck enjoyed the corn and fresh water. He decided to stay for an hour, then for a day, then for a week, and finally, for a month. At the end of that time, he contemplated flying to join his friends in the vast North land, but he had begun to enjoy the safety of the barnyard, and the tame ducks had made him feel so

welcome. So he stayed for the summer. One autumn day, when his wild mates were flying south, he heard their quacking. It stirred him with delight, and he enthusiastically flapped his wings and rose into the air to join them. Much to his dismay, he found that he could rise no higher than the eaves of the barn. As he waddled back to the safety of the barnyard, he muttered to himself, "I'm satisfied here, I have plenty of food, and the area is good. Why should I leave.?" So, he spent the winter on the farm. In the spring, when the wild ducks flew overhead again, he felt a strange stirring within his breast, but he did not even try to fly up to meet them. When they returned in the fall, they again invited him to rejoin them, but this time, the duck did not even notice them. There was no stirring within his breast. He simply kept on eating corn which made him fat." End of parable.

Christians are destined to fly the highest heights of the world toward heaven.

Sadly, we can see the things the world offers and get distracted from flying. We walk, or waddle, among the barnyard when we are created to fly. As the parable above makes clear, the temptation to stray from God's flight plan can begin almost imperceptibly. For example, we stay home from church one Sunday, then two, and it becomes normal not to get in the car and go. Our kids get used to sleeping late. More corn. Then we have trouble flying and realize that we have gained a pound or two of worldly influence. Then, we hear our friends fly by and want to join them, but can't quite make it up there. We go back to being satisfied with mud and muck,



and our wings begin to atrophy a little more. Time passes, and we die a little without realizing it. Perhaps we are able to fly for a time, we get back in the flock, so to speak, but we are not used to the rigors and gifts needed for flying, and soon fall back to the spiritual barnyard, or boneyard. People might say or do things they used to, but now we have no idea what they mean. Occasionally, we feel this strange stirring in our breast. The spiritual hunger Augustine wrote about a thousand years ago when he said, “Our hearts are restless till they find their rest in Thee.” It gets weaker the longer we stay away. Nothing will quench it but the spirit of God in Jesus Christ. Then, the most tragic thing happens. We don’t even feel that stirring anymore. When our friends fly by, we don’t even notice their quacking. Even worse, we forget what quacking is. We forget words like life, redemption, forgiveness, salvation, mounting up on wings of eagles, and are content with peck, dig, dirt, and waddle. We are spiritually dead, and even begin to think we are better off. We begin to see life as normal outside the flock, when the birds we are hanging around with us are nothing like we are. On the outside, yes. On the inside, they don’t have a clue. We keep on eating the wordly corn, becoming fat with the cares of the world.

My friends as Christians we are made to fly... to soar ...

Jesus calls us to do more than just listen to the gospel... to hear the wonderful stories... more than just settle back and enjoy the wonders that God has shown us.

He calls us even to do more than have faith. God reminds us that words can never take the place of deeds.

God Calls us to act on our faith... God calls us to put Feet to our Faith.... And not just to talk the walk...but to walk the walk.

God calls us to walk the talk... that is our mission ... a mission that never ends..

One day when St. Frances was hoeing his garden... he was asked, “St. Frances.... What would you do...if you knew you had only o day to live.. St. Frances replied, “I would continue to hoeing my garden.” ( ASQuotes.Com)

And may we “hoe in God’s garden” may be work in God’s Vineyards until it is time to meet our makers. God calls us to put Feet to our Faith...and not just talk the Walk but to walk the walk.