



The Divine Slam Dunk – Touchpoint for September 27, 2023

Matthew 21:23-32 (NIV) The Authority of Jesus Questioned

²³ Jesus entered the temple courts, and, while he was teaching, the chief priests and the elders of the people came to him. “By what authority are you doing these things?” they asked. “And who gave you this authority?”

²⁴ Jesus replied, “I will also ask you one question. If you answer me, I will tell you by what authority I am doing these things. ²⁵ John’s baptism—where did it come from? Was it from heaven, or of human origin?”

They discussed it among themselves and said, “If we say, ‘From heaven,’ he will ask, ‘Then why didn’t you believe him?’ ²⁶ But if we say, ‘Of human origin’—we are afraid of the people, for they all hold that John was a prophet.”

²⁷ So they answered Jesus, “We don’t know.”

Then he said, “Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things.

The Parable of the Two Sons

²⁸ “What do you think? There was a man who had two sons. He went to the first and said, ‘Son, go and work today in the vineyard.’

²⁹ “‘I will not,’ he answered, but later he changed his mind and went.

³⁰ “Then the father went to the other son and said the same thing. He answered, ‘I will, sir,’ but he did not go.

³¹ “Which of the two did what his father wanted?”

“The first,” they answered.

Jesus said to them, “Truly I tell you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you. ³² For John came to you to show you the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes did. And even after you saw this, you did not repent and believe him.

Grace and Peace to you from the mystery in whom we live and move, and have our being.

“By what authority are you doing these things?” they asked. “And who gave you this authority?”

Here is my question today: *On whose authority do I speak?*

When they asked Jesus on whose authority he did the things he did, he asked them on whose authority John did what he did? Heaven or man?

This recalled the amazing dialogue between John and Jesus in the Jordan River. At this first encounter, John was awestruck, his body sinking to be baptized by the very one he was preparing others to encounter. “No,” Jesus said, stopping him mid-gurgle. “John, you baptize me,” Jesus said. John says, “I’m not worthy to baptize you.”

It appears following God begins with an awakening of our intrinsic belonging. A moment of clarity and humility. An awareness that I've always belonged even before I knew it. Jesus knew this. Before he started his journey, Jesus told John the Baptizer that it was necessary for him to surrender any personal status and distinctiveness and be baptized... becoming the beginner, the mentee, letting go of image and reputation... a call to be like a child in a pool. Children don't know how to swim, yet they experience the water safely in the arms of their parent. John was stunned and questioned his own worthiness.

Jesus said something like, "You don't understand John. I'm doing the 12 Steps and the first step to all transformation is powerlessness." Jesus knew he must humble himself and leave his ego beneath the immersive waters of the truth of his identity. As Paul said, Jesus did not see equality with God as something to be grasped...

Jesus rises from the water and hears the words of his declared identity, "This is my son and in Him I well pleased!" It is like a tattoo on the heart that reads *El Roi*, the God who sees me. I belong. It cannot be removed by isolation, desolation, or even self-loathing. Nor do the voices of rejection or condemnation, whether external or internal, remove us from belonging. For those voices do not have the authority to determine one's identity. It is a heart that is sustained and motivated by the truth of God's declaration, separate from feelings.

Belonging has to do with truth. Believing is about thinking. Belief cannot determine truth; it is but a mission statement. My words here do not determine truth, they are but an expression of my experience with the Mystery.

According to the encounters Jesus had with people, there was never a prerequisite to belonging. There was a call to think straight! Awaken to your declared identity that cannot be earned. Believe! Take advantage of the benefits of your declared identity. You have the Father's DNA. This is what helped me understand truth.

So, I have a son named Josh. As far as I know he has my DNA. We've never gone on Jerry Springer, so I can assume he is my son. That's the truth. Nothing can change that. But let's imagine Josh and I have a disagreement. For Josh, it's irreconcilable. He tears the proverbial pocket of his shirt and says, "I disown you." His declaration cannot change the truth that he is my son, and I am his father. He simply has and messed up shirt. Josh wants to separate from me and moves to the opposite coast. Is he still my son? Of course he is. Imagine my daughters and I go on a vacation we planned for a long time. Enjoying a cruise, the beach and all the perks. Josh chose not to go but, he is still my son. He's just not taking advantage of the benefits of being my son and a part of the family.

Perhaps this is exactly what sustained the life of Jesus amid his suffering.

Jesus had to believe the truth of his declared belonging, for his human disappointments, public rejections and questions of his authority would surely come.

Jesus did the will of his father, not his own. Why would he answer a question on his authority based on lineage, law or victories? His authority, and identity, came from his father, expressed in his surrender to something greater than himself. It wasn't acquired from a good cable debate performance or popularity. The father declared the identity of Jesus. Jesus chose to surrender to it. So are we, declared free at the pleasure of the Father.

Jesus encountered this truth at his baptism. His belonging was already an innate slam dunk. He was surrendering to the truth of his belonging.

What we think may not be the authority, but it reveals what we have surrendered to. If we believe that we belong once we ask the Spirit to indwell, then prior to this moment, we did not belong. There would be prerequisites. What if we always belonged in our intrinsic nature? Changing our thinking, *metanoia* (repentance), is simply surrendering to the declared truth that always was.

Saying this is simply the way I've come to think, but thinking does not give me authority to declare. So, who gave me the authority to speak today? You did! Spirit in the Desert. Now I must take responsibility for my decisions. We, as parents and grandparents, leaders and influencers, must take the responsibility to make decisions. We have the responsibility to make decisions, but not the authority to say what is right. We have the permissive will of God, given to us to live in liberty, but not the authority to determine what is right. Being in "*the way*" of this intrinsic truth gives liberty to this seminary flunky and I surrendered to the ultimate authority as a dunk-ee.

A friend of mine told me she knows someone who was in church and the invitation for communion was being given. The "invitation" included, "If you have done the following please do not come to the table." She thought, "This is not your table!" and her sadness grew. When it was time for her row to go forward she went, took communion, and left, never to return. This friend's sadness was for all those who felt like John, unworthy to go to the waters of belonging.

You and I are declared worthy and are welcome to come to the table and participate in the benefits of belonging.

Amen

Opening Songs

Be Still

(The London Fox Taize Choir, Remember Me)
Be Still, know that I am God

Calm Me, Lord

(Margaret Rizza)

Calm me Lord as you calmed the storm.
Still me Lord, keep me from harm.
Let all the tumult within me cease.
Enfold me Lord, in your peace.

Bible Passage

(A passage takes us from one place to another)

Touchpoint

(Where God's story touches our life story)

Healer of Our Every Ill

(Marty Haugan)

Healer of our every ill, light of each tomorrow.
Give us peace beyond our fear, and hope beyond our sorrow.
You who know our fears and sadness.
Grace us with your peace and gladness.
Spirit of all comfort, fill our hearts. *Refrain*
In the pain and joy beholding, how your grace is still unfolding
Give us all your vision God of love. *Refrain*

The Meal

Lord's Prayer

(Monastery Choir of St. John of San Francisco)

Benediction

Gaelic Blessing/Deep Peace

(John Rutter, The Cambridge Singers)

Deep peace of the running wave to you.
Deep peace of the flowing air to you.
Deep peace of the quiet earth to you.
Deep peace of the shining stars to you.
Deep peace of the gentle night to you.
Moon and stars pour their healing light on you.
Deep peace of Christ, of Christ the light of the world to you.
Deep peace of Christ to you.