



SPIRIT IN THE DESERT

Matthew 21:23-32

When Jesus entered the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came to him as he was teaching, and said, “By what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?” Jesus said to them, “I will also ask you one question; if you tell me the answer, then I will also tell you by what authority I do these things. Did the baptism of John come from heaven, or was it of human origin?” And

they argued with one another, “If we say, ‘From heaven,’ he will say to us, ‘Why then did you not believe him?’ But if we say, ‘Of human origin,’ we are afraid of the crowd; for all regard John as a prophet.” So, they answered Jesus, “We do not know.” And he said to them, “Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things.

“What vineyard today.’ He answered, ‘I will not’; but later he changed his mind and went. The father went to the second and said the same; and he answered, ‘I go, sir’; but he did not go. 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. 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.”

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

First, I’ve got to place a magnifying glass over something hidden in the dialogue between Jesus and his audience in the temple. An implication I think may be of eternal importance. Jesus said;

“Truly I tell you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are going into the kingdom of God ahead of you. 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.”

According to the words of Jesus on who can enter the kingdom of God, chief priests, elders, tax collectors, and prostitutes will all enter. The question is not *if* they will enter, but when. For me this affirms the kingdom of God as a present reality. It is a very personal and transformational movement from the kingdom of self into the kingdom of God.

In the kingdom of God Jesus’ authority does not come from “the big man upstairs” or by any institution or social structure. Jesus embodies the kingdom of God in a world held hostage by the kingdom of self.

Each moment of our lives we are invited away from the kingdom of self and into the kingdom of God.

For me, every time I become aware of my obsession with the kingdom of self, it requires a conscious choice to enter the kingdom where God is the only one who has authority over my identity and worth. The door is only opened by emptying the self, letting go, and asking our pesky ego to wait outside.

In the kingdom of God, we are no longer labeled board member, pastor, IRS agent, or sex worker. We experience something beyond the kingdoms of this world.

These words from Jesus declare our intrinsic belonging and challenge our heart's willingness to embody the truth of our belonging. This truth cannot be contained by any one moment, institution or ideology.

Though it thrills me to see Jesus affirm the universal belonging of all people, this is not all he is stressing. He is saying I must believe the truth that I belong to take flight. I must have a change of mind and heart. I must believe in my eternal belonging and allow the reverse flow from spirit to soul to embodiment.

It is not a rule, it is the physics of God's kingdom. The sooner I choose to leave the kingdom of self; the sooner I enter the kingdom of God because God abhors a vacuum. God will fill the space that was occupied by egoic obsessions so create a vacuum! Make space for the divine more to rush in.

This is the purpose of contemplative practices. This is what can happen in our personal temples. No wonder Jesus was saying these things inside a temple! It was personal for him.

The symbol of what he called the house of God where all should be welcomed was being monetized for the kingdom of self. No wonder he tossed the tables that blocked the entrance. No wonder he refused to answer their question that was more like, "Who do you think you are, Jesus?! Humility is the key that unlocks the door and they lost their keys.

Those gatekeepers of the temple had no authority to prevent others from entering the temple of God. They had no authority to place a value on anyone who chooses to enter.

The label of elder, priest and prostitute are all the same because they are labels given within the kingdom of the world. Within the kingdom of God, we find rest in the presence of the only King having the final say over who we are.

Entering our inner temple, the kingdom of God becomes a challenge if we make the outer parts of our temple an intricate and disparaging measure of worth for ourselves and others.

May we confidently enter the inner kingdom of God where peace awaits with Presence.

*Awaken to the mystery of being here and enter the quiet immensity of your own presence.
Have joy and peace in the temple of your senses.
Receive encouragement when new frontiers beckon.
Respond to the call of your gift and the courage to follow its path.*

*Let the flame of anger free you of all falsity.
May warmth of heart keep your presence aflame.
May anxiety never linger about you.
May your outer dignity mirror an inner dignity of soul.
Take time to celebrate the quiet miracles that seek no attention.
Be consoled in the secret symmetry of your soul.
May you experience each day as a sacred gift woven around the heart of wonder.*

From **To Bless the Space Between Us** by John O'Donohue

AMEN