October 1, 2023 **GOD’S SUSTAINING PRESENCE**

The gospel text for this Sunday Matthew 20: 23-32 speaks about how our words match our actions when it comes to obedience to the will of God. It is both our actions and our words that communicate on which side of the fence we are standing whether it be obedience or rebellion.  Everything that we do or says something, speaks about who we are and what we believe.

In this gospel passage right after the chief priests and the elders refused to answer Jesus’ question, Jesus told them a parable about two sons. A father of two sons bids them to go to work in his vineyard. The first one said no and then later changed his mind and went. The second one said, yes but refused to go and work. So, when Jesus asked them, which son did the will of their father, they naturally answered the first. It was then that Jesus told them, the chief priests, and the elders that there were sinners who were going ahead of them into the kingdom of God.

Jesus was pointing out to them that they were like the second son in the parable who said that he would go and did not live up to his word. There are two ways that we can take our stand. We can be like the chief priests and elders who talk the talk but did not walk the walk. The Chief priests and elders were not fruitful. They were in the positions that they were able to make little impact upon the world that they lived in. They were instead ineffective. They liked overseeing religious matters. Jesus and His views were a great threat to their way of doing things. Their views were shaped by their own agendas. They seemed to exhibit a behavior that acknowledged God and their obedience to God. Yet, their actions, and their seeming promise was lacking in performance. For me they were all works without faith.

The chief priests and the elders would more than likely be the kind of people that Jesus was talking about when He said, as we read in Matthew 7: 21- 23 (RSV) **“**Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you evildoers.”  It is God’s will that we work and be fruitful in His kingdom.

I once heard a fellow minister say, "We often sing about "Standing on the Promises of God", while we are sitting on the premises". For us to be fruitful we must have faith that acts and brings forth fruit because. In James 2:26 (RSV) we read “For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so faith apart from works is dead”, which means faith apart from its works of obedience is also dead.

We cannot be fruitful in the spiritual aspect of life unless we obey God’s will. There are times when we might delay before we decide to obey. The time for us to obey is now. While driving if we were to delay in obeying a STOP sign, then one of three things might happen. We might get a ticket. We could get in an accident. Or, we could have a close call where we just barely escaped an accident. The point of the matter is that we are fruitful when we are obedient, and we are not so successful when we postpone and disobey.

When we obey, we are fruitful. When we are not obeying, we come across as a momentarily blind person who will lead one (or others) who is blind astray. The chief priests and the elders proved how costly it was to them as others; repentant sinners were entering the kingdom of God ahead of them. Jesus was pointing out to them that if they delay or postpone obedience to the will of God, they would not be able to enter God’s kingdom. If you would like to know more about God’s Sustaining Presence, please join us in our worship on Sunday at 11:00 AM.

Peace!

Rev. Dr. Christopher Ponnuraj

Minister

West Center Congregational Church

101 Pondfield Road West

Bronxville, NY 10708