

Scripture:

Psalm 121

Matthew 21:23-32

“I will show you the way.”

Our Psalm today is a great and powerful reminder that God is watching over us.

The last verse ----- “The Lord will watch over your coming and going both now and forever more.” ----- are some of the greatest words of comfort in the whole of scripture.

Whether we come or go ---- whether we come or go now or later ----- whenever and wherever we come and go ----- God is watching over us.

Every step --- and every stage of life ---- there is one great and dominant constant ----- God is watching over us.

And not only this but as God watches over our lives He is also forever opening doors and showing us the best and most faithful ways.

Sometimes we don't hear --- or we don't listen even though we hear --- other times we simply ignore --- maybe we're too busy --- or too timid ---- or too fearful ---- other times there are too many personal distractions and sadly God doesn't stand a chance of getting our attention ----- and then thankfully there are also those times when we suddenly hear God clearly.

Whatever the case ---- God watches over our coming and going --- and shows us the way.

Whether or not there is a faithful way forward is never up for debate ---- whether or not God is with us every step of the way --- is never up for debate --- the question is ----- “Are we willing to go where God so leads us?”

“Are we willing to go where God so leads us?”

In the abstract we all say yes --- but in the concrete we often falter.

Sometimes we're too fearful ---- or distracted ---- disoriented or selfishly concerned with other matters --- and God's will eludes us?

In Matthew's gospel today the will of God eludes the Jewish authorities.

They question Jesus about His authority not because they genuinely want to know but because they are weak and fearful.

They know that if they say He is who John said He was --- they will look foolish for not getting on board and sharing this great and saving news.

And they also know that if they deny who John said He was they will lose favour ---- as so many people were already convinced of what John said.

Too fearful and weak to actually figure this all out --- they try to entrap Jesus by getting Him to say something that will put Him in a compromised position.

It was their job to determine true and authentic --- as well as false and damaging prophets.

And time after time they had no problem telling people what they thought with conviction and certainty.

But then along comes Jesus.

And although they clearly recognize something different about Him --- they are hesitant -- to make a statement and take a stand on Him --- so they go to Him timid --- uncertain ----- and fearful --- pretending as if they actually care what He has to say --- when all they really want to do is entrap Him and compromise His authority and influence.

And Jesus simply turns it back on them saying ---- "Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things."

And He then goes on to tell them a story about appearances and authenticity.

A story about how things look --- and about how things actually are.

A story about the difference between saying all the right things ----- and doing the right things.

The first son in the parable of the two sons says he won't go ----- and then does a complete turn around and goes.

And then the second son says he will go but changes his mind and doesn't go after all.

Both do a complete turn around ---- doing the opposite of what they said they were going to do.

At first glance --- on his word ----- it would appear that the first son is the bad one --- but as is so often the case appearances fail us ----- and in the end he does the right thing.

And the opposite of course is true for the second son --- he appears good --- and obedient --- says the right things ----- but in the end is anything but good and obedient.

Obviously in life ----- the one who actually does is better than the one who says they will but never actually follows through on it.

Doing trumps just saying you will --- and then never actually following through.

Doers are preferred to just talkers in life --- actions speak louder than words.

Are ways we might sum up this first part of the gospel today.

Jesus ---- in answer to His own question ---- about which son was true to what his father asked of him ---- says this ---

“Truly I tell you ---- the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you. For John came to show you the way of righteousness --- and you did not believe him --- but the tax collectors and the prostitutes did. And ever after you saw this --- you did not repent and believe him.”

On the surface the tax collectors and the prostitutes really didn't look much like God's people --- but it is their response to God's messenger and God's message that is precisely what identifies them as the people of God.

We can say all the right things --- but never actually be a people of God if our hearts aren't also sincerely and fundamentally oriented to Him.

As Jesus Himself said a little earlier on in Matthew's gospel --- chapter 7 verse 21 ----- "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 who is in heaven."

In other words --- words don't cut it --- disposition of the heart matters most.

Words are important --- and they are certainly a good place to start --- but in the end they don't cut it.

We can say all the right gospel things ---- and never truly be a person of the gospel.

God wants more than just the right words --- He wants more than just our lips He also wants our hearts.

Jeremiah 6:16 -----

"Stand where the roads cross, and look around.

Ask where the old paths are.

Ask for the good path, and walk on it.

Then your hearts will find rest in me."

When we give our hearts over to God ----- He shows us the way.

The authorities are questioning Jesus because they are lazy weak and frightened --- and all they are truly concerned with is saying the right and safe things --- they're aren't actually concerned with goodness truth and beauty ---- they just want to come off as good people --- good people saying all the right things ---- they are playing it safe.

Their reputations and appearances matter most to them --- they come off as pretty good and decent.

In contrast --- by all appearances the tax collectors and prostitutes are dreadful.

But when John came to show them the way ---- they repented ---- they changed --- and they changed not just the words they spoke but their very being.

The authorities question Jesus not because they truly want to know about Him --- they question him because they want to retain their power and status and position in the culture.

They never really want the truth and beauty and goodness of God to manifest itself in their midst --- instead they want control --- and they will say just about anything as long as they still remain in control --- that's why they are wishy washy as to what to say about Jesus because they don't want to lose favour and power.

“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 who is in heaven.”

“Truly I tell you ---- the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you. For John came to show you the way of righteousness --- and you did not believe him --- but the tax collectors and the prostitutes did. And ever after you saw this --- you did not repent and believe him.”

Notice Jesus doesn't damn them outright --- He doesn't say you will not enter the kingdom of heaven but the tax collectors and prostitutes will enter before you.

In other words the door is still open ---- He doesn't slam it shut in their face ---- instead He invites them to hear the saving message of God's truth again.

He wants to show them the way again --- indeed He does show them the way again --- and again and again and again even.

God always shows us the way.

If we listen and follow God's lead we will always get it right in the end.

He always shows us the way if the truth is what we seek and not just what we want to hear --- that which agrees with our assumptions and our way of thinking.

Immediately following our passage today --- Jesus says ----- "Listen to another parable..."

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In other words Jesus gives them another chance to get it right.

It's as if He says ---

----- "I sent someone --- John ---- to show you the way --- but you pushed him aside and basically ignored him --- so here you go --- here's yet another chance --- I'll show you the way again --- and I'll show you by once again sharing what the kingdom of God is like --- and maybe ----- just maybe this time ---- you'll respond as the other low life's did --- you know the tax collectors and prostitutes --- who believed and changed ---- repented --- because their attitude is the one desired by God --- even if their outward appearance is less than ideal."

Our hearts are a battle ground --- and Jesus can tell us over and over again just who He is --- but unless we cultivate a disposition that is genuine and eager to do His will ---- we're doomed to only ever a superficial life where we get all caught up in the need to express ourselves and not also the goodness beauty and truth of the gospel.

God will always show us the way if we are eager to follow.

God is a great and reliable guide ----- He is the great and reliable guide --- the only one who can ever navigate this wild and wonderful thing called life on earth ----- where competing forces are forever battling it out for the territory of our hearts.

We can choose to let Him show us the way --- or we can think we've got it figured out ourselves.

It's not good enough to just try to say and even do the right things --- we must also orient our hearts to the kingdom of heaven.

The table before us is a poignant reminder that we are fed by the very life of Christ and not all the rest of the things we can find in this world.

The table reminds us in a visible way that God continues to show us the way.

And the table reminds us that Jesus was willing to put it all on the line ---- regardless of how it appeared and regardless of the cost.

This table is a great reminder and a great symbol of courage and faithfulness ----- it is a bold statement that God shows us the way even when we are uncertain of what exactly that way entails.

Sometimes --- often with God --- we don't get the detailed step by step map ---- often all we get is the very next move ---- and so we have to give over and trust in Him.

We gather here --- around this table ----- not because we are wise or clever.

We gather not because we have it all figured out.

We gather not because we're any better than anyone else.

We gather because we are humble and submissive --- aware of the fragility of life on earth --- and of life in faith.

And we gather because we know the one whose life death ministry and resurrection we celebrate --- shows us the way --- always has and always will.

Today is God's day.

We gather in His name --- we celebrate His greatness ---- His goodness --- His beauty --- and His truth ---- the saving love of Jesus Christ.

"I will show you the way!" --- Jesus says to us --- over and over and over again --- and then He does.

Our hearts are a battle ground ---- sin resides there --- it doesn't just creep in from time to time ----- it has permanent residence there ----- thankfully God shows us the way --- the only way to overpower its crippling grip.

Jesus Christ.

Meeting Christ at the cross ----- and meeting Christ at the table ---- and then following Him where ever it is that He takes us.

The world will throw in all kinds of obstacles --- to try to get us to follow things other than Jesus Christ.

“I will show you the way” ----- Jesus says --- “Come and follow me.”

To the authorities in Mathew's gospel today Jesus says --- “For John came to show you the way ----- but you didn't believe him... --- but these people here ---- they did --- the tax collectors and the prostitutes --- they believed and they changed the disposition of their hearts.”

“For John came to show you the way...” ----- Jesus says in Matthew today --- ----- and the same is true today ---- God shows us the way.

That's the goodness of God in action ----- we're not left wandering around uncertain.

The Jewish authorities were uncertain --- they didn't want to follow --- they wanted to lead --- they were pretty self certain.

We're not to be self certain.

As Christians we're not to be self certain ----- we're to be Christ certain ---- certain about Christ and what He says --- and what He asks --- and what He directs us to do.

We have the great guide of God --- Jesus Christ --- and so we need no others.

Even the tax collectors and the prostitutes got it ---- or at least some of the tax collectors and prostitutes did.

Follow Him --- Jesus --- turn away ---- repent --- allow yourself to be made new in Him.

How much more hope is there for us then ---- knowing that no matter how far down we may sink into self certainty ----- God reaches down to us in great love and compassion ----- and grabs our hands.

In Matthew's gospel today when asked about who He was --- His authority -- Jesus doesn't defend Himself --- He tells a story and He continues to teach and lead and show the way.

He is always showing us the way.

And so we gather --- and we give thanks --- and we celebrate His great and saving love.

As we are just about to sing together --- "Here oh my Lord I see thee."

Here oh our Lord ---
----- we see thee --- showing us the way once again.

Let us prepare our hearts ----- to meet our Lord at His table.

God is good.

As we sing ----- reflect --- and prepare ----- remember we are about to be in communion with Him.

The table is set ---- boldly and humbly we approach ---- with Christ showing us the way.

Amen.