

Why Are You Here?

Proper 21, Year A – Matthew 21:28-32

preached at St. Paul's, Henderson, September 28, 2014

Lord, take my eyes and see through them. Take my lips and speak through them. Take my soul and set it on fire with love for thee. Amen.

All this week, as I reflected on Jesus' story in this morning's Gospel lesson, I kept asking myself about the real difference between those two boys. Having raised two boys, I can tell you that, if I were telling a story like this one, the difference might be just a matter of one or the other of them being in some sort of mood. Of course, Jesus wouldn't have wasted his time talking about that sort of thing. Well, maybe he did, but the Gospel writer wouldn't have wasted a good quill on it, and the Church wouldn't have preserved it for us, and all that. Anyway, I got to thinking that Jesus was pointing to something a bit more profound in asking his disciples to examine the motives of these two young men, and that got me to ask about my motives and yours.

Why are you here? Why am *I* here? Why are we here on a Sunday morning, when like a great many of our friends and neighbors, we could be in our beds taking what is for most of us nowadays our only chance to sleep in? Why are we here singing and praying in seats that aren't particularly comfortable? Why are we here in this anachronism of Victorian interpreted Gothic construction on the Ohio River?

Oh, I know the short answers. Many of you are here because your friends are here and you wanted to be with them. I think psychologists call it something like social development. There are those in the business world who have taken to calling it "networking." We in the Church generally call it fellowship and are careful to always serve coffee, and maybe some sort of pastry. Whatever you call it, it's an important part of who we are and it's good we are here to be with one another.

Then there's the "*should*" component. Many of us are here because we know we're *supposed* to be here – to meet some sort of obligation, to fulfill some sort of promise, to hold up our end of some sort of covenant. At five o'clock this morning, as I hauled my self from my bed, I assure you that duty and obligation were among the reasons for my feet hitting the floor. And of course it's true – we *should* be here.

Finally, there's the idea that we are here in this English anachronism on the river... because we're Episcopalians – and we have *always* been in our appointed place on Sunday morning, as were our mother and our father, and their parents before them, and their parents before *them*. It is, after all, how things are done.

But of course, all that merely puts off the real question again: why are we here? With other opportunities for socialization and fellowship, other chances to see and be seen, why this one? Wouldn't a round of golf or a nice dinner with friends do just as well? With other duties and obligations probably put on the back burner, catching up at work, or getting the kids to their game, or visiting elderly parents, why attend to *this* one? Among all the perfectly proper alternatives that we have this morning, why *this* choice?

And why do we do the things that we do here? Why build a place like St. Paul's? Why establish another congregation of worshipers in a crook on the river? Why stack bricks and mortar, link oaken trusses, and cover the whole thing in protective stucco? Why fill these walls with stained glass windows that cost more than most people's annual wages at the time? Why the expense of a pipe organ and terrazzo floors and this beautiful pulpit?

Why am I standing here in garments patterned after clothes from the Roman Imperial court and last modified in the middle ages, some that I'll put on later made of damask that is too heavy and *way* too hot to be at *all* practical, when y'all know perfectly well that around town I wouldn't be caught dead in damask? Why do we drink tawny port from a silver cup, carefully

wiped with a linen napkin, when plastic and paper seems to work perfectly well everywhere else? Why raise our own voices in centuries-old hymns when most of us get most of our music at the push of a button or a, “Siri, play Sinatra.”

Why do we teach our children stories from a two-to-four thousand-year-old book when *most* of those stories are not nearly as exciting as the Harry Potter or Hunger Games? Why do we think it’s important to reach outside our own family here, through the Diocese, through CCO, through the Discretionary Fund, through our individual giving, to help those in the larger community and throughout the world? Whether we are tithing ten percent or working toward that goal, why do we make our giving to and through *this* community part of our spiritual lives, part of our *prayer*, rather than just another charity?

Why do we do all the work that we do? Why do we spend all the time that we spend? Why do we go out of our way to reach above the normal, above the mundane, above the common? Why are we here?

Let me suggest that it comes down to this: We do the work we do because we serve a God who at the beginning of beginning spoke into being all that we can see and a thousand universes that our puny eyes cannot see and our puny minds cannot even imagine. We serve a God who before time was even in the picture sang a single note that became all that became. We serve a God who, from all indication, sang that note for no other reason than his love for you and for me.

We spend the time we spend because we serve a God who showers us with overwhelmingly abundant gifts day by day. We serve a God who sustains us and nourishes us and challenges us. We serve a God who gives more than we can ask or imagine. We serve a God who laughs with us in the joys and victories of our brightest days, and who weeps with us in our darkest nights. We serve a God who for a thousand *thousand* blessings deserves nothing, *nothing* less than the best that we have to offer.

We reach past the ordinary of our life and grasp for the *extraordinary*, because we serve a God who laid aside the incomprehensible glories of heaven, who stepped down from golden streets and emerald seas and pearly gates and whatever other superlatives the poet prophets could come up with. We serve a God who turned his back on all that and the praise songs of the angels to become one of us, to live for *us*, to die for *us*, to rise... for *us*.

A man asked his two sons to go into the field and work for him. One of them said, “Yes, Daddy,” but didn’t leave his room. The other sassed back, but got up and did the work. “What do you think?” Jesus asked. “Of the two children, who did what was right, the obedient one who didn’t do the work, or the mouthy one who did?”

What do you think? Why are we here doing the work of the Father? Is it just to see and be seen? Is it just because we know it’s our duty? Is it just the way we have always done things? Or are we here doing the work of the Father because we have seen the glory of God – in the eyes of our children and in the eyes of our elders, in simple bread and uncomplicated wine, in the day-to-day, sometimes common and sometimes mundane stuff of our lives – because we have seen the glory of God and we can’t help but share that good news? You see, Jesus told his disciples, it’s not about what gets said, or even about what gets done. It’s about what is in the heart. My heart. Your heart.

That, dear friends, is why *I’m* here. Why are you here?