



SERMONS AT SAINT MARK'S

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THE SEVENTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST – OCTOBER 1, 2017
EZEKIEL 18:1-4, 25-32; PSALM 25:3-9; PHILIPPIANS 2:1-13; MATTHEW 21:23-32

FOOL FOR LOVE

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 do you think? A man had two sons; he went to the first and said, ‘Son, go and work in the 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.”

People thought he was a fool. He was disrupting every rule of the culture. He was claiming that even religion was not fundamentally about the dogma that everyone clung to. He was associating with, and saying to care about, and further justice for, poor and undesirable people. He was

saying crazy things about God, about radical love.

Is anyone here thinking, “Jesus?”

If that’s the case, shouldn’t we be saying, “Hey, that’s me!”

Am I not a follower of Jesus? I know it’s uncomfortable. It always has been. But in

our stretch of living, in this particular nation at this particular fraught time in history, we are in especially uncomfortable times. People are being reviled even for *peaceful* protest in the name of justice. Name calling and intentional division masquerade as leadership and we all get sucked in to follow, choosing sides because we can barely help it. Just tolerating each other feels like radical love. *But it isn't.*

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Is anyone here thinking, “St. Francis?” Because the statue in our gardens, with the birds on his shoulders, is the least of it. He embodied radical love. St. Francis was famously a FOOL for Jesus Christ. And as author Rhonda Mawhood Lee puts it: “St. Francis didn’t argue with those who thought he’d lost his mind. He admitted HE was fool enough to believe that Jesus **meant his disciples to live as he had instructed.**” And he tried to do it.

You know, St. Francis didn’t start out as a fool for Christ. He was born into a wealthy family and he sought glory. He tried twice to achieve it as knight, but ended up giving away to a fellow unarmed soldier his fancy armor that his father had bought him –

liking the glory having a fancy knight for a son would bring to the already fancy family. Francis was a big disappointment, a fool. He became someone who embraced poverty, who loved widely, overwhelmed with his love of God, exhibited in prayer and abdication of worldly things, and in radical love for the poor and for all creation.

He was so overwhelmed he wrote the stunning paean *Canticle of Creation*. “Be praised Good Lord for Brother Sun, and Sister Moon, and Brother Wind, and Sister Water and Brother Fire and Mother Earth.” Not are we just stewards of our planet, we are kin!

Where did he get that? St. Francis experienced God as “all good.” He wrote, “You are holy, Lord God Who does wonderful things. You are strong, You are great, You are the most high...You, holy Father, are king of heaven and earth.... You are the good, all good, the highest good, Lord God living and true.”

For Francis, since God was “all good,” he saw the goodness of God in everything God created – in creatures, in his fellow human beings, even, and especially, the shunned. Foolish in the eyes of the world, this Giovanni Francesco Bernardone, St. Francis. What kind of fool would sell his father’s goods to rebuild a broken-down church he came upon? – And no, I’m not talking about those of you have donated to St. Mark’s capital campaign! ...But MAYBE I am, if you are a fool for Christ!

How many of us would raise our children to denounce every benefit you have worked hard to afford for them, to give stuff away, to embarrass us in public, and to muck about people who really are never going to amount to anything much anyway? It would be foolishness! St. Francis, striving to live as Jesus taught, gave up things of the world, lived in austerity among the poor, talked to animals, so they say.

We think that's lovely, for HIM, because he's a saint, not us. In fact, after the Blessed Virgin Mary herself, the most popular garden statue of all is St. Francis. I have one in my house, that my parents gave to me when I was confirmed in fourth grade and chose Francis of Assisi as my patron saint, you know, because of that animal thing.

It wasn't until I went to a Franciscan university, St. Bonaventure in upstate New York, that I actually got to know anything beyond that about St. Francis. It goes a lot deeper, but it is summed up in a very straightforward statement: **he loved Jesus enough to try to live like Jesus.**

Can we? It's a real question during stewardship season, when we're asked to put our money where our ministry is. *OH NO! She's ruining St. Francis Day talking about pledges!* But seriously, are we foolish enough in the eyes of the world to put our money where our MINISTRY is? Because for all our hands and feet that do work as Christ's hands and feet in the world, from caring for the women who make Noel House

their nightly sanctuary, to installing the shower in the room that will provide sanctuary space for our Casa Latina neighbors – if there were no money, there may be no ministry.

That's why the way we use our money is integral to our work as Christians, is, indeed, part of ministry. It's more than paying for lights – and some heat! – in our big, beloved holy box. It's making ministry happen...

...Just part of our ministry of following Jesus Christ. In today's Gospel, the chief priests ask him, "By whose authority are you doing these things?" We know the answer to that. So when we stand against a fearful and divisive movement in our culture, when we act as Christ's hands and feet in the world in our ministry, we are acknowledging an authority, and more so, an allegiance, a love, that is above tribalism, nationalism, or narrow self-interest. By whose authority do we work for justice? We know the answer to that, too. It's the same one St. Francis ascribed to when he started a movement that lives to this day. **Believing that Jesus meant what he said about how to live!**

There is a perversion today of our once-proud notion of rugged individualism that claims that there is something wrong in being asked to share, and to give of, what we perceive as "ours." But can we as Christians celebrate St. Francis's embrace of creation by bringing our animals to be blessed, but begrudge health care and food programs and voting access and safe haven to our

neighbors? That's not St. Francis. And it's certainly not the Jesus St. Francis was following.

Today's Psalm is perfect for reflecting the life of St. Francis: The Psalmist cried, "Lord, teach us your ways!" and we repeated the cry here thousands of years later: "Lord, teach us **your** ways!" Are we all talk, like the second son in today's Gospel? "Yes, teach us your ways, Lord," we say, but then we don't go DO it?

I think Francis looked that question right in the eye and made a radically foolish decision, to follow the radical love of Jesus that was

perceived so foolish as to be blasphemy in his own time. And continues to be. "For the wisdom of this world is foolishness before God." **Can we be fools for love of Jesus?** Can we give of ourselves following Jesus' example, and Francis's example of what that might look like? Can we bless all creation as good stewards of the Gospel message that is foolishness to the world, and salvation to those foolish enough to try to live as Jesus taught? That is what we celebrate in St. Francis, and today's Gospel: to not just say yes, but to DO "yes." Be a fool for love of Jesus.



SAINT MARK'S
EPISCOPAL CATHEDRAL

Saint Mark's Cathedral lives in a grounded faith and spirituality; we seek to liberate people for ministry. We are grounded in ancient Christian scripture and tradition while at the same time remaining open to the insight and truth of contemporary life. You'll find Saint Mark's Cathedral actively involved in service and outreach to our community. Together we pray, worship, study the scriptures, and explore the richness of twenty-one centuries of Christian experience. Wherever you are on your journey of faith, you are welcome here!