

Homily 27 September 2020

'By whose authority are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority.' Ask the chief priests and the elders as Jesus is teaching in the Synagogue.

Describe to me someone in authority, what do they look like? What do they do?

[people with positions, titles, those charged with or relied up to speak in an authoritative way]

Be honest if you are picturing an older white man in a good suit. That is what I think most westerners might think.

If we try to subvert that notion – who would you say has authority but perhaps doesn't fit the image? Ghandi, Jacinda Ardern, Malala Yousafzai, Greta Thunberg People who speak words that others connect with and follow.

When Jesus is ask about his authority he cleverly turns the priests and elders question back on them, by asking about John the Baptist. It can seem like John just has a walk on part in the story of Jesus but in fact he is crucial in bringing people to their senses. His call to listen and turn again to God and hear a new thing that God is doing. John challenges the status quo and opens the way for Jesus. And we can see just how important his role was, in this exchange between Jesus and those with power.

It's complicated, the people with power, the chief priests, recognise that John is powerful, the people believe in him. If they go against John the people might turn on them, they are scared of the people.

It is the people who have recognised the source of John's power, he is God's prophet. The Chief priests would not accept that because it threatened their power and he didn't fit into their image of a religious person.

The people who have heard John's call and been baptised are probably not those who fit into the image of a religious person either, according to the priests.

Jesus parable about the two sons is another invitation to the chief priests and elders to listen and hear something new that God is doing.

A man had two sons, the first appeared to be willing to obey his father's request, but then didn't bother. The second at first sight, not a good son, refusing to help, yet ultimately he comes through and does what his father has asked.

The door is still open, there is still a chance for them to change their minds.

But Jesus doesn't look like the Messiah, God's chosen one. He does not behave like a Messiah, is not shiny and all powerful and obeying all the laws that the learned priests and teachers lived by. He is mixing with the riffraff.

Jesus comes divested of the trappings that we think of as powerful. As we heard in the first reading. "Being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the

point of death, even death on a cross.” Jesus, fully human feeling his way into God’s will for him, explaining as he goes to his closest disciples. He doesn’t look like we might expect God to be.

Turn it round we are made in God’s image – how do we look? How do we think we are meant to look? In Jesus we see a vulnerability and a handing over of power. Yet we are encouraged to think that to be successful we must be invulnerable and in control.

Jesus way is one of humility and wisdom, not standing aloof but asking questions and listening to answers, drawing round himself diverse friends, not always the most obvious characters, and fellow workers to share a vision. Caring for people and especially those in most need.

So as we continue to pray for our world in peril through Climate Breakdown, and our world leaders as they tackle the catastrophic effects of the Corona Virus pandemic what are we looking for in those with power and authority? If we believe that the people in power must be faultless and immovable our expectations are unrealistic. If those in power believe that of themselves then we are in peril.

The danger that powerful people face, and indeed ordinary people who think they always have the right answers is that they are so wedded to their way that they are open to no other way.

Jesus words can open our hearts and minds, for everyone always there is a chance to rethink and have a change of mind, the door is still open. Amen