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 Proper 21A : Matthew 21:23-32
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The *Toy Story* movie franchise,
 the first of which came out more than 30 years now, is fantastic.
 All five movies explore different facets of change—
 About changing beliefs about the expansive nature of love
 About how the passage of time implies and forces change
 About how introducing new variables into the equation
 Means we too often have to adjust.

Jesus talks about change today, too, and before we can talk about it,
 it's helpful to situate ourselves.
 Two significant things happen the day before this passage takes place:
 1— Jesus rides triumphantly into Jerusalem. Ppl are shouting Hosanna
 (save us), saying Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.
 We celebrate this every year as Palm Sunday.
 We sing the latter in every Eucharist.

And then, right after coming into Jerusalem, in Matthew, Jesus goes into the Temple
 and starts kicking people out (specifically folks selling stuff), overturning tables, etc.
 So the next day when Jesus returns to the Jerusalem temple,
 whose importance cannot be overstated,
 the chief priests and scribes ask, "Who said you could do this?"

And honestly, if someone came in here one day
 and started throwing prayerbooks out of the window and such,
 you better believe I'd have questions
 about what made them think they could do that.
 In other words, the original question,
 Could very well be an honest one.

Jesus answers the question with a question— a classic rabbi move.

Jesus' question-response brings John the baptizer into the conversation,
Which he was not before, and the mention of John
changes the course of the conversation.

John the baptizer, who did NOT have
a traditional position of authority.

John the baptizer, who Herod,

Who most certainly did have authority,
If rather poorly wielded,

John who Herod had killed John.

John the baptizer, who, as mentioned here, who some are calling prophet –
and prophets are often ignored until much later when folks realize, hey,
that rambling strange man might have had a point.

So chief priests and scribes are not at all prepared for this or any question

About John the baptizer, and I can't fault them for that. .

They as a group decide to answer "We don't know."

"I don't know" can be an incredibly faithful answer,
a wonderful place to lean in.

The "We don't know" itself is not the problem.

"We don't know" here is problematic b/c of its motivation

They are not trying to give the most correct or an honest answer—

rather they want to give the least inflammatory response,

an answer least likely to create problems for them

an answer the gathered crowd will mind the least

By way of response to the disingenuous of “We don’t know,”

Jesus tells one of his most straightforward parables,

One child says yes i’ll go into the vineyard then doesn’t actually go

One child says no I will not go into the vineyard and then does.

Which child does the will of the father?

The answer is obvious, and it’s meant to be.

Matthew ALWAYS wants to highlight

connections and continuity w/ Judaism,

& this is no exception.

Both children, not just one, in the parable make the challenge clear:

That a verbal commitment still needs to become action—

that’s change, a change in action.

AND that an earlier refusal/opinion/belief can be changed

At the end of today’s Gospel passage, Jesus brings in his classic reversal,

saying that prostitutes and tax collectors—

here are meant to symbolize the lowest rung of the social scale—

will be received into the kingdom before chief priests and scribes—

People who are at the very tippy top of the scale.

This would be like someone who just started listening

to Taylor Swift being given early access

to her tickets,

before the fans who have been

with her since like Fearless.

Y’all honestly the constant renegotiation and calibration and self reflection

Change normally demands can be exhausting, for crying out loud

I mean, right now it seems everything everywhere all at once is changing,

And a lot of that change is negative

The US Constitution being ignored or blatantly violated,

AI getting out and going rogue

It can't help that in English, the word "faithful" itself is synonymous
 with steadfastness, constance, loyalty, all of which are positive,
 all of which suggest NOT changing.

And though English is not everyone's first language here,
 It is predominant in most of our lives today.

There is so much telling us to be
 wary and suspicious of change.

And yet God's honest truth is, Jesus asks us to change more often than not.

Two weeks ago, Jesus told a story about God's absurd mercy
 and told us to reflect that mercy, though on a much smaller scale.

One week ago, Jesus told us a story about God's ludicrous generosity

And told us to keep our eyes on our own papers

When the divine extends that generosity

Since the generosity is beyond large.

Jesus is constantly asking us

To change our actions,

To change our minds

Some very faithful people have changed their minds and their actions.

This one person reportedly stood by, serving as a human coatrack,
 while Stephen was being stoned to death.

Later on, during a life changing experience on the road to Damascus,

This man is given the charge to go tell folks about Jesus—

Which is like asking a white supremacist

to write haikus about racial harmony.

Meet Paul— love him or hate him,

He is one of the most influential

people of the Western world—

all b/c he changed his mind

And his actions.

Another person left his life of privilege and his family

After an epiphany about the inevitability of sickness, death, and aging,

He took both mediating and fasting to the extremes—

And it got him nowhere.

So, he changed his mind & his actions **again—**

Bless him— & began searching for the middle way,

Which he found under a tree.

Meet the Buddha.

Paul and the Buddha are kinda hard to live up to

but on the other hand they do show just how far reaching positive change can be.

W/ our bias against change,

w/ the not so fabulous examples we have right now,

It is worth remembering that change can be good

That change can be of God to the point where

without many of our forebears

being faithful enough

to change their minds,

Change their actions,

Change their hearts,

We would not be sitting here today.

Sometimes the most faithful thing we can do is change.

Amen.