



Shadow Faith
Matthew 21:23-32

Sunday, September 27th, 2020
First Federated Church of Peoria Illinois
The Rev. Dr. Forrest Krummel, Jr.

Text: Which of the two did the will of the father? (v. 31)

Shadow values are the values that stand behind the stated values of an individual, church, business, or organization.

For example, how you invest your time or spend your money is a better reflection of your real values than what you say. More often than not, the modern adage, "follow the money" is a pretty faithful Geiger counter in discovering one's true values.

The New Testament Letter of James put it more succinctly; "Show me your works and I will show you your faith for faith without works is dead".

In order to wrap our heads around today's lesson we need a little context.

When Jesus entered the Temple the chief priests and elders of the people asked him by what authority did he teach and do what he did. In other words, who made him the Boss? This raises the question, what did Jesus say and what did he do that troubled them so?

Just prior to our lesson Jesus turned the tables upside down driving out the money-changers and those who sold sacrificial pigeons in the Temple.

In turning the tables upside down Jesus turned the whole status quo topsy turvey!

AND THEN, if that wasn't bad enough, the blind and the lame, the impure, incomplete, unclean, and the unwelcomed came into the Temple!

If that wasn't bad enough, Jesus healed them of their afflictions!

The next day when Jesus returned to the Temple he was asked, I imagine rather angrily, "By what authority are you doing these things and who gave you this authority?"

Now I can't be sure what happened next but I like to think that Jesus paused and took the measure of his inquisitors before responding.

"Let me ask you a question," Jesus replied.

"If you answer it, then I will tell you by what authority."

Now, I can almost feel the chief priests and elders body tense up.

It was kind of like when a drum teacher that I have years ago told me of the time when he joined the musician's union here in Peoria. The union rep said, "Can you play what I play?" to which my teacher gave the cheeky reply, "I'll play what you play if you can play what I play!" Needless to say, rather than take the chance of embarrassment, the union rep passed his student.

"The baptism of John", Jesus asked, " where did it come from; from heaven or from humans?"

Oooooo, the inquisitors were now in a bind.

"If we say that it is from heaven, he'll ask "Then why did you not believe him?" And if we say that it is from humans, people will be upset because they think John was a prophet."

Rather than risk their reputation and authority they took a pass.

"We don't know."

"Well, then" Jesus continued, "I won't tell you by what authority I do these things."

And then Jesus told the parable of the father and two sons.

Do you wonder why the chief priests and elders were offended?

It was because they knew, and the people knew, that Jesus was talking about them!

They were the son who said that he would do what the father wanted but didn't do it. AND that the "broken" were the ones who said that they would NOT do what the father wanted but ended up doing it anyway!

A lot of people today say that they are spiritual but not religious. And you gotta wonder what exactly that means?

It means that they have seen too many "religious" people saying one thing and doing another. They have seen too much shameless hypocrisy in those who call themselves "religious". They have seen church fights and splits and grudges and retribution among those who claim to be Christians.

Religion, at its best, is the guardrail of spiritual development and maturity. But when religion becomes an end unto itself or a weapon, it ceases to be spiritually nourishing.

Years ago in their book *The Edge of Adventure* Bruce Larson and Keith Miller wrote that "the neighborhood bar is possibly the best counterfeit there is to the fellowship Christ wants to give His church. It's an imitation, dispensing liquor instead of grace, escape rather than reality, but it is a permissive, accepting, and inclusive fellowship. It is unshockable. ... The bar flourishes not because most people are alcoholics, but because God has put into the human heart the desire to know and be known, to love and be loved ...

"With all my heart I believe that Christ wants His church to be" they wrote, "...a fellowship where people can come in and say, 'I'm sunk!' 'I've had it.'"

But too often this is not the case.

In the earliest years of ministry I remember serving a church where one of the pillars of the community and the congregation quit coming to church because he was ashamed. It was the early 1980s when many grain elevators began to fail. This pillar of the church went bankrupt and he was ashamed to face his community. He was afraid to go to church because he was afraid that he would be judged a failure.

Yet, the church was the one place, if it was true to its calling, as the body of Christ, where he could go and not be judged.

It was the one place where he could go and feel the loving embrace of Christian fellowship.

The church should have been the one place where he could go and be reminded that, in the words of the apostle Paul, "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."

It should have been the one place where he could have found grace.

And when he finally did return to church, after a pastoral call and a visit from a couple of the elders, he found that that church, that congregation was true to its calling.

You see, the church of Jesus Christ is not a refuge for saints but a hospital for sinners.

The chief priests and elders were more interested in maintaining their position rather than serving the least.

They were more interested in keeping their religion pristine than developing spiritual maturity; more interested in homeostasis than healing the hurts of the world.

Jesus a little later in Matthew's gospel account when he said that the religious were so careful to tithe their mint and dill, the smallest income from their herb gardens, while neglecting the far weightier matters of justice, mercy, and faithfulness.

They professed one thing, but practiced another. Ironically their shadow faith shed light upon their true faith.

How about our shadow faith; is it a reflection of what we really believe?

To God be the glory. Amen.