

Sermon – 17th Pentecost
Matthew 21:28-32 (Ezekiel 18:25-32)
October 1, 2017
“Trust”

Obedience - we associate it with weakness - we think submission to a set of outdated cultural or religious rules. Conversely, we hear the word “trust” and we may think dependence yes, but more likely confidence in someone’s character, ability, or the truth of what they say. Unlike obedience, trust has a positive connotation – it suggests we believe in something and don’t just follow something. Yet in the Bible, two words are not mutually exclusive at all – in fact they are synonymous with one another. The obedience of anyone in the Bible to God, where you find it that is, came because of their trust in the character of God and the truth of what God says. It’s never a sign of weakness but of a relationship growing stronger. I offer two modern stories of obedience – not as standards we must meet - each person’s faith and circumstance is unique - but examples of how trust and obedience work.

Jatya is a 90-year-old pastor in India just having come off his 9th beating at the hands of police or an angry mob in his town. After each he goes home, heals up, and after a while, Bible in hand goes into town seeing if he can strike up a conversation about Jesus. Of his scars and broken bones he says he’s grateful for the physical evidence of his faith they represent. He quotes II Timothy 1:7, which says “*God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and love and a sound mind.*” So, he goes to town visiting people he knows need Jesus but who he also knows may report him to authorities who are more than ready to administer beating number ten. “*God has forgiven us on the cross*”, he says, “*and has told us to forgive...so I forgive them.*” Of how long he’ll go to town with his Bible he says; “*until my last breath.*”

Rachel knew she was not attracted to men, but one day entertained the clearly romantic overtures of a young man she’d gone on a mission trip with the previous summer. Arriving at her door with flowers, Rachel reminded her suitor that she’d slept with more women than he ever would. Not exactly a great relationship starter there. He was undeterred however, because he realized that if Jesus had forgiven her of her past – he had no business holding anything against her. In the complicated and controversial world of sexual orientation and same gender relationships I will not dwell. Only to say that for Rachel, falling in love with and trusting another man was possible for her, despite her continued same-sex attractions, because she believed this was God’s will and Jesus way for her to live. Believing that the intimate relationship her natural desires wanted was off limits even though she believed in a loving, intimate, companion seeking God, Rachel said “*I learned my first lesson of the Christian life – how to obey before I understood*”, adding “*the obedience of faith only works when its rooted in a person, not a rule.*”

Proverbs 3:5-6 says “*trust in the Lord, with all of your heart, and lean not on your own understanding, but in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will direct your paths.*” Indeed. I repeat – I offer up these examples of incredible Christian faith and obedience not as required prototypes but as genuine possibilities. In other words, the obedience of faith is an act of faith – made possible by knowing the faith giver-Jesus. But I nonetheless offer them as genuine possibilities. They embody the obedience Jesus in our lesson from Matthew praised from folks whose experience of life would be remote to almost every single one of us.

Nothing in our passage from Matthew suggests that the tax collectors and prostitutes whom Jesus praised did anything other than embrace a costly obedience to Christ. We should not infer therefore that the ladies merely reduced their client list or the tax collectors merely settled for extorting less money from fellow citizens. To believe is to obey completely just as we are forgiven completely. Trust and obedience are travel together. We trust because Jesus obeyed the will of his Father and did not consider his own life too high a price to pay for ours. We obey because we trust what such a Savior says is best for those lives of ours he died for. Dietrich Bonhoeffer in book “*The Cost of Discipleship*” said; “*grace is costly because it calls us to follow...but it is grace because it calls us to follow Jesus Christ.*”

Nothing in our story today requires of us any specific action but to trust in Jesus – but it does require that. It includes no litany of God’s preferred behaviors. But everything in this story promises that trust in Jesus will change a person, and that means that something changes in a person’s behavior. What has Jesus spoken to you, but what he has spoken to everyone; “*come, follow me.*” Follow means obedience, yes. But it means obey *Jesus*, who loves you and whom you can trust only seeks what is good for you. What has Jesus called you to do – or stop doing I suppose? I can’t answer that and quite frankly I don’t think folks like Rachel or Jatya would either. They heard what Jesus laid on their hearts and followed.

Galatians 2:20 says “*the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.*” It’s your relationship with your Savior Jesus that determines the path you follow in the life that God has loaned you to live. You have good direction for how to - that’s what God’s word the Bible is for so be a student of it. You can’t be a follower of Jesus and not. Jesus is the final word – Jesus, as John’s gospel says, is the one “*full of grace and truth.*” You live under his grace and so here is the truth. Freely you have been forgiven – so forgive. Abundantly God has provided for your life’s needs – so be the vessel through which that abundance reaches others. Jesus the man learned obedience through what he suffered, and perhaps you will or have too. But when it comes to life and how we ought to live it remember the one you follow is not only Jesus the Son of God but Jesus your friend. AMEN