

Mark 11: 27-33

27 Again they came to Jerusalem. As he was walking in the temple, the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders came to him ²⁸and said, 'By what authority are you doing these things? Who gave you this authority to do them?' ²⁹Jesus said to them, 'I will ask you one question; answer me, and I will tell you by what authority I do these things. ³⁰Did the baptism of John come from heaven, or was it of human origin? Answer me.' ³¹They argued with one another, 'If we say, "From heaven", he will say, "Why then did you not believe him?"' ³²But shall we say, "Of human origin"?'—they were afraid of the crowd, for all regarded John as truly a prophet. ³³So they answered Jesus, 'We do not know.' And Jesus said to them, 'Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things.'

Commentary: Jesus is confronted once again by the religious leadership. They question him in a hostile fashion. They want to know who he thinks he is and by what authority he does what he does. Jesus' response is not avoidance. It indicates how closely he associates his ministry to that of John the Baptist. John baptized him and it was during this baptism that he received his commission from God to preach, teach, heal and represent God's will for his people. If they acknowledge the authority of John's baptism as instituted by God then they must acknowledge John's testimony about Jesus. If they reject John's baptism they will also reject Jesus. Their response is no response. They prefer to play it safe and be politically correct at the same time. Jesus will not be party to their game.

What risks are you prepared to take to be truthful and honest with others? What typically prevents you and me? Is it fear for ourselves or for the other person? We want to be liked, we want to avoid conflict or maybe we have accepted what is as it is and have lowered our expectations for the relationship. But do lowered expectations also reveal the value we place on the relationship? Have we lost faith in what's possible? Is it too much of an investment and commitment for us right now? Have we convinced ourselves that doing the right thing is about being kind and safe rather than truthful and honest? In this time of Covid-19 when we all have to find ways to connect or be together in ways that can increase stress and irritability if not conflict, be a time when we put relational issues that involve honest truth-telling and listening on the shelf for now and accept what is as it is?

These are difficult questions with no straightforward answers. But doing nothing is also doing something. We are making choices all the time in terms of our relationships, and the more primary they are the higher the stakes for our own authentic humanity.

Prayer: Have mercy on us, O God. Grant us your grace. May we be gentle on ourselves and on others. But may we also find new courage, new faith, hope and love in what's possible. May you feed us with a new kind of trust in the way of truthfulness and honesty for the right reasons. Transparency leads to trust and trust is genuine respect for the humanity of others and that of our own. Help us, O God. Give us discernment, O God. Following Jesus all the way is difficult, O God. But we know this is the way; Amen.