

It's Not What You Know....
Mathew 11:16-30

Those words that we just heard are some of the most challenging in all of Mathews Gospel. Reading the parallel passage in chapter 7 of Luke's Gospel we learn that Jesus was speaking to the Pharisees- the religious bullies of the day, when He asked that pointed question in verse 16- "But to what shall I compare this generation?" What does a story about children playing in the streets of Galilee have to do with the Pharisees? What was wrong with that generation? Even more importantly, what does it have to do with our generation?

Since we are living some 2000 years after they were first written, the parable that Jesus used to make His point may need some explanation. Just as some kids today play games like house or school, or church or pretend they are getting married, children in Jesus day did something similar. They would play wedding and funeral, pretending they were grownups experiencing the greatest joys and sorrows of life. And just like today, there would be childish arguments and disagreements among them. Just like today there will always be a few who just like to stir up trouble, a few who are never happy.

In a nutshell, Jesus was telling them that they were grown adults acting like little children playing in the streets arguing with each other. You know how kids are- the ones making up the rules of the game will get mad at those who refuse to go along with them and then some sort of disagreement results. Those playing the game have hurt feelings because some are not willing to play along with them, while those who refuse to play along want to do their own thing without being made to feel guilty about their choice to do something different. Much like adults in real life situations, the two groups are at odds with each other.

Can you hear Jesus preaching? You people are never happy! God sent John the Baptist to you in the spirit of the prophet Elijah, wearing coarse clothing and eating nothing but bugs and wild honey, and you made fun of him. He was a prophet who spoke the truth and you accused him of being possessed by a demon.

And then the Son of Man comes, preaching the same message but in a different manner, and you call me a glutton and a drunkard. What more can God do to have you believe? You are just like your ancestors who refused to heed the words of the prophets. You will never find rest for your soul unless you grow up and put your selfish ways aside.

The problem with the Pharisees and their generation is that they were living in their own little world of pretend and make believe, oblivious to what was going on around them. The long-awaited prophet whom the Scriptures foretold would come in the name of Elijah was right there in their midst, and they refused to believe it was him. Then Jesus came, and in His presence the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised and the poor have the Gospel preached to them and yet they rejected Him as well. Eugene Peterson says John came fasting and they called him crazy-Jesus came feasting and they called him a lush.

In their self-righteous minds, they did not need to hear any preaching about repenting. They were the wise ones, some of them were filled with knowledge of the Scriptures. They were the learned ones, quite capable of figuring things out for themselves. They were not about to be lectured to by some bum from the desert or some stranger who made a habit of hanging around with lost people. Can't you hear them? Just who do these guys think they are anyway telling us we need to repent? They are the ones who need to repent. So much for the Pharisees and that generation. What does this have to do with our generation. What does it have to do with you and I? The simple answer is that Jesus does not want us to make the same mistakes they did.

If we are honest, we must admit there are times when we too act like little children. We are stuck in our own little world of make believe, a world where we believe we can make God into whoever we want God to be, a world where we can ignore and break the commands God has given us without consequence. If we do not always get our way, we get mad and want to take our ball or our dolls and go home. Other times we resemble those grownup self-righteous Pharisees, refusing to acknowledge our sinfulness and our need for a Savior. In verse 25 Jesus sarcastically refers to them as the "wise and understanding", in other words trusting in themselves rather than the One God sent to save them from their sins.

Neither is a good place to be. If we choose to live with that generation, we face the same judgment as those cities Jesus mentions by name. **Regardless of the date and time, we ignore the words of the prophets and the words of Jesus in the Scriptures at our own risk.** I recognize it is not a popular concept for the wise and understanding of today's age, but dozens of Scripture passages confirm a day of judgment is coming. There is no question about it. Verses 20- 24 are just as true as verses 29&30. We can close our eyes and ears to the truth and try and convince ourselves otherwise, but sooner or later that game will end. When the day of the Lord comes, what we thought we knew will not matter. When that day comes, it will not matter how hard we worked to enter the kingdom. When that day comes, no lives will matter, regardless of the color we put on our signs. In the end, what will matter is this: we trust and believe the Scriptures to be the inspired, infallible, complete, and undeniable word of God and that we have put our faith solely in Jesus Christ. The words of Jesus are true. Come to me you who are heavy laden, trying to work your way into the kingdom, and I will give you the rest you seek. Learn from me, I am gentle and lowly in heart. You will rest for your soul in me. Nothing else will satisfy our longing!

The truth is that on both sides of this pulpit are people who have fallen short of the glory of God. We are people in need of the redeeming love of Christ, yet at times we remain indifferent to the Scriptures and the calling of Jesus. That is especially true where unresolved dissention and strife cause us to see the worst in people rather than the best. At times, some of us fall further than others, yet as followers of Jesus we remain a chosen people. We are a chosen people, called and equipped by God to be for the world the body of Christ, and at the same time a fallen people that has us scratching our heads wondering what God is up to and why He loves us so much. I cannot tell you why He does. I am just thankful that He does. He does not want us to make the same mistakes the sinful generation of the Pharisees did.

It does not seem possible, but today marks the beginning of my 14th year in the ministry. I am thankful to see some of you who were there the first Sunday I stepped behind the pulpit at Richard Brown. Much has changed in those fourteen years. There have been some rough patches along the way, but each day has truly been a blessing. As we continue our journey together to find perfect love of God and perfect love of neighbor, there will be more victories and defeats along the way.

During those times when we seem to be losing the battle, I trust that we will remember that all things are possible with God. I trust that we will remember that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.

I thank you for affirming my call to ministry and for allowing me the privilege to share God's Word with you from this sacred place. I pray that by God's grace we will grow closer to Jesus in our faith and inch ever closer to our elusive yet enticing goal of Christian perfection. I pray we will reach it together. Amen