

to you All Hearts are open

The Collect for Purity, Book of Common Prayer

Reflection by The Rev. Joe Hensley



The Rev. Joe Hensley is the rector at St. George's in Fredericksburg.

Before ordination, Joe worked for a community dispute resolution center as a mediator, facilitator, and trainer. He also served as a professional lay minister with youth at Holy Trinity, Greensboro.

Over the years, Joe has had occasional work as a professional musician, Outward Bound instructor, retreat leader, and performing clown.

The chief priests and the elders question Jesus: "By what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?" Jesus has been overturning the tables of the moneychangers and curing the sick inside the temple. This outsider has literally turned things upside down and usurped the position of the ones who think they are in charge. No wonder they are upset.

In the life of faith Jesus often overturns what we think is the proper order of things. We may even recognize that something amazing is before us. Our heart is opening and healing is happening, but there is a voice in our heads that says, "Who is in charge here? Why am I not in control?" We find ourselves defensive. "What will happen to my authority over my life if I go along with Jesus?"

We know that as members of the church, part of our spiritual practice is to give and give generously. Yet we often argue with ourselves. How much is too much? How are my gifts being used? If I take a bold leap of faith, will there be trouble for me? Sometimes we argue so much with ourselves, we end up doing nothing or just enough so that we are still comfortable.

When the voices in our head are arguing, Christ is the head who can open our hearts. The practice of Christ-centered stewardship is not just about using our God-given gifts. The act of giving is itself a way to surrender control and be changed through sacrificial generosity, following Jesus. This generosity pushes against our perceived limits and our concepts of authority so that God can bless us.

The sin of the chief priests is not that they question Jesus' authority. They sin by refusing to change their minds and accept God's grace. There is nothing wrong with resistance. The first son in the parable resists at first but eventually goes to work. Where are you stuck? How are you unable to receive the wondrous gifts of grace by trying to remain in charge? In the midst of our questions and resistance, God can use our practices of sacrificial giving to bless, soften, and shepherd us under Christ's authority. With practice, we will find ourselves more joyfully entering the vineyard, using the gifts God has given us to do the work God calls us to do.

Proper 21 | Matthew 21:23-32
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Reflection Questions

- Where are you stuck?
- How are you unable to receive the wondrous gifts of grace by trying to remain in charge?

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