

Year A Trinity 16 Proper 21

Philippians 2.1-13; Matthew 21.23-32

In an age of ever more clever scams, we are right to know by what authority someone is asking us to do something, or give them money, or even provide them with our own personal details. It is right to question them.

But what about when we are asked to do something by someone who we know has been given authority? Our Government, our teachers, our Bishops? Yes, we may challenge, but should we flout their authority?

And how do we respond to the authority of God himself?

The religious leaders questioned Jesus' authority, they questioned his rule of love.

It was love that gave John the Baptist the command to call Israel to repentance and Jesus had no time for theoretical arguments about the source and nature of authority with those who rejected John's loving and saving summons.

Jesus' authority was and is who he is and we are called to live and serve under his authority.

Our role model for service is Christ himself as we heard in the well known Reading from Philippians.

We are called to serve with humility, integrity and joyful hope.

Humility is a much misunderstood virtue. It is tempting to think that being humble is simply all about thinking badly about yourself in comparison with others. But Paul, in our epistle reading, paints a picture of what it truly looks like - humility looks like Jesus.

Jesus did not deny who he was, but he made the choice to give up the glories of heaven in order to humble himself and become human.

Being humble is not about putting myself down, it's just not needing to promote myself.

C S Lewis said: ' The thing about a truly humble person is not that they think less of themselves, but they think of themselves less.'

And it is as we allow God's Holy Spirit to work in us to affirm our true identity in Christ, that we will be able to make the daily choice to humble ourselves, secure in our relationship with him.

And our call to serve with integrity, is linked with our call to humility. We are to be the people God has called us to be. We are not to try and be someone else, neither are we to expect other people to be somebody else.

We are called to be honest before God and one another.

And in a world of wish washy standards, where anything goes, we are called to seek to live and serve as Christ did. We are called not to 'get around things' but to do the 'right' thing.

And, finally, we are called to serve with joyful hope.

In a world where there is so much sadness, fear and darkness, we are called to live and serve with joyful hope.

In our lives we are to bring a message that things can change, darkness can turn to light, sadness to joy, hatred to peace and despair to hope.

That is the message which Jesus taught and lived. That is the message we are to live and bring to others through the God's Holy Spirit and the support of one another. Amen.