

Be a signpost (Matthew 21:23-32)

A couple of weeks ago, I mentioned that my youngest daughter was on a Duke of Edinburgh practice expedition weekend, where she learnt amongst other things how to pack a rucksack so it doesn't feel too heavy or too uncomfortable to carry. Well, now we discover whether she learnt what she was taught.

This weekend is her assessed two-day expedition. So she's spent the week hunched over a map, plotting a route, make a list of directions and acting as a signpost for the group she'll be walking with ...

Hold that thought of a signpost.

In this week's passage from Matthew's Gospel, Jesus is now in Jerusalem. He is speaking in and around the temple in Jerusalem., the focus of the faith of God's people at the time of Jesus. His teaching had already caused controversy out in the sticks, but now imagine how incendiary it must be at this centre of faith.

Jesus is asked by the temple officials about his authority and where he gets it from. But, as often as is the case, instead of an answer Jesus responds with another question and a story or a parable about two sons.

The first son gives the wrong answer, but does the right thing. And the second answers appropriately, but his actions undermine his words. Jesus presents a clear challenge "Which of the two did the will of his Father?"

Jesus has turned the conversation away from a question of authority to one of obedience - "Which of the two did the will of his Father?"

Jesus' link between authority and obedience is no accident. The son who'd agreed to work in the vineyard but failed to turn up lost all authority and credibility within the household. Who would trust him ever again? The other son who turned up despite words to the contrary was someone who walked the walk, rather than talking the talk. Ideally the third option - someone who said and did the right thing - would be best. But given that option wasn't available - actions spoke louder than words.

Despite what we may think, many people have a curiosity in Christianity in general, and Christians in particular. They are quick to call out hypocrisy when they see it. They would rather people walk the walk, than just talk the talk. They want people's lives to be signposts to God. And of course, Jesus is the ultimate signpost. He talked the talk, he walked the walk (to and beyond the cross) and he lived the life for us, signposting us to his Father. He said that he is the way, the true and the life. And that no-one comes to the Father except through him.

Being a signpost to God is important and that is exactly what we are all called to be. But the amazing thing about a signpost is that it doesn't just point the way ahead, it points the way behind too.

Jesus told those listening that tax-collectors and prostitutes would be in front of the chief priests and elders when it came to the kingdom of heaven. They had a story to tell, about the life that they had led, the love and acceptance that Jesus offered them and the change that Jesus brought to their lives.

Don't be afraid of your life and telling others about it. It's your story to tell. But also be prepared to talk about what Jesus means to you and the effect he has on your life. Talk that talk, and walk that walk and you will be a signpost for God in the world.

Prayer for the Week

Lord, for you and for ourselves;
by your living power remake us.
May we put self upon the cross
and Christ upon the throne.
Help us to put our past behind us,
and for the future lead us.
Lord of our lives, help us to be signposts for you.
May we talk, walk and live for Christ alone. Amen.

(based heavily on Timothy Dudley Smith's hymn 'Lord, for the year your love has kept and guided')
