

Twisted Parables

Matthew 21:23-32

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There is a wonderful story about a group of military leaders who succeeded in building a voice activated app called Athena. She after all was the goddess who inspired and fought alongside the Greeks. The app was able to solve any problem large or small, strategic or tactical. These military leaders assembled for a demonstration of this new military app. The engineer conducting the demonstration instructed these officers that all they had to do was say, **“Hey Athena...”** followed by a difficult strategic or tactical problem. The Generals proceeded to describe a hypothetical situation to the app and then asked the pivotal question: attack or retreat? Athena paused just long enough for the generals to have a lil doubt And then in a brilliant English accent said, . . . 😊 YES. 😊 The generals looked at each other, somewhat stupefied. Finally, one of them submits a second request **“Hey Athena, YES WHAT?”** 😊 Instantly the app responded: **“YES, SIR.”** 😊

The Pharisees, like these generals, were accustomed to people saying **“Yes, sir”** to them. They were the religious authorities. They were used to being treated as such. But there was a new teacher in town, a teacher who was threatening their authority. The Pharisees were alarmed. They feared Christ’s popularity, his ability to heal and to perform miracles. In their eyes, Jesus was preaching heresy and leading people away from the religious traditions that defined the Jews. The Pharisees wanted to expose him as a fraud.¹ It was in this context that Jesus told a story about a man who had two sons.

The creative writer Father Andrew Greeley sheds light on this twisted parable with a parable of his own—about two sisters who worked as babysitters in their community. A young couple had recently moved into the neighborhood. They hired the younger of the two sisters to sit with their children.

Imagine their surprise when they came home to find their house a complete mess, with their kids looking disheveled, and the babysitter half asleep on the couch.

The next day, however, the children excitedly told their parents how they had fun with the new babysitter, and how she had helped them do some assignments including saying their prayers.

The next time the couple needed a sitter they hired the older sister. They were greatly impressed when they got home this time to discover the house was tidy and the kids were already in bed, teeth brushed, hair neatly brushed and fully asleep. **“The kids have been like angels,”** the older girl announced, and, gratefully, the couple gave her an extra tip.

The next morning the kids came complaining to their parents, accusing the babysitter of yelling at them with swear words, texting her boyfriend instead of helping them with their assignments, and then forcing them to go to bed early while she went outside and vaped and chuckled incessantly at her friends snap chats. Now, if you were in the shoes of these parents, which of the babysitters will you hire the next time?²

I don’t know about you but back in the day when the kids were younger Jen and I had similar sitting experiences. So, I know who I’d pick. I’d pick the younger sister. She had the highest levels of integrity. She was value driven and if her value was to be the best babysitter it didn’t depend on whether the house was clean or not. Afterall, the young couple didn’t hire her to be a house cleaner did they? And I’ll tell you what, I’d much rather train a good sitter how to tidy up a bit than a bad sitter how to be good to my kids.

Having integrity, especially Spiritual Integrity, is about behaving in the way you promised to behave. If you have Spiritual Integrity it protects us from our changing moods, desires and feelings. It even protects us from the changing moods of those around us of society. It protects us from saying we are going to do something and then doing something else.



It's how we at Calvin do more than just talk the talk we walk the walk. We walk the walk by putting our desires, wants, even our needs aside so that we can discern God's will. So, if we believe the scriptures to be true? If we believe we are to not take ourselves too seriously and to do justice, love kindness and to walk humbly with the Lord. If we believe the law and the profits are summed up in Love God, Love Others as you Love yourself? If we believe we are to forgive infinitely and love our enemies and pray for those who've wronged us. Then that's what we do no matter who they are or what they did or whether or not it's good for our bottom line.

One day Jesus told a parable designed to teach people about Spiritual Integrity it's a foundational characteristic. His target audience was the pharisees, those who claimed to be the most righteous, but had become self-righteous.³

On this day the Lord has made, Christ's target audience is us, his beloved church. Are we discerning God's will? Or are we like Harriet running home in fear because we fell in the garden? Are we separating ourselves from the equation? Are we putting our best interests aside and doing what God is calling us to do for the widows, the orphans, the marginalized, the outcasts, those on the outside of society the least of these?

Friends, let us not be twisted like the pharisees let us not be twisted like this parable. Let us diligently chase after Christ's heart, let us be driven by his love alone, let us be of unquestionable Spiritual Integrity!

Amen?!

¹ Adapted from King Duncan, Collect Sermons

² Adapted from <http://www.agreeley.com/homilies99/sep2699.html>.

³ Adapted from Otis Young, Integrity Deficit Disorder

