

Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost – 2026

Ezekiel 18:1-4, 25-32

Philippians 2:1-18

Matthew 21:23-32

Dedication of Stained Glass Windows: The Parable of the Ten Virgins – Bobbe Monk Memorial

There's a John Mellencamp song that speaks to me. It's a rebel song and I was a rebel as a youth – I'm still not always a rule follower. It's the refrain that sticks with you: "I fight authority, authority always wins." When I play that song into my headphones as I mow the lawn, the Vice-Principal's mug from my high school days pops into my mind. I never won a battle with that guy. Good thing, too. The Vice-Principal was law and order. The Vice-Principal was authority personified at West Albany High School. I made a mess of my high school years. I fight authority, authority always wins. How often does the drunk driver argue with the policeman about his blood alcohol level and the drunk driver wins that argument? I fight authority, authority always wins. It's hubris, isn't it? It's pride, it's an outsized opinion of oneself. Icarus was warned not to fly too close to the sun. I fight authority, authority always wins. Not many of you, unarmed, would stand toe-to-toe with a lion and challenge his authority.

Jesus taught as one who had authority. Clarity, power, veracity – those who heard Jesus teach had an encounter with unmistakable authority. Jesus spoke directly from His divine standing. The Lord Christ didn't say: "Thus saith the Lord." Jesus said: "Truly, truly I say to you." Jesus was authority personified. Jesus was and is authority incarnate. He gave sight to the blind. That's how He used His authority. The Lord Christ made a paralytic walk, cured the leprosy, fed a multitude with provisions that wouldn't satisfy two hungry boys – that's how Jesus used His authority. God's Son had authority and He had come to use it. He changed water into wine, He calmed the storm, He raised Jairus' daughter, He raised the widow of Nain's son, He raised dead Lazarus. All of this is glorious! All of this is awesome and marvelous and exhilarating and wondrously good. The people who were paying attention knew: "Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come" (Revelation 12:10).

Some didn't like it. Check that... some *hated* it. Those who hated it were the religious rulers, authorities of a different, less authentic sort. They are bent on challenging Jesus. "By what authority are you doing these things and who gave you this authority?" (Matthew 21:23). The tone of the question is this: "Hey bub, just who do you think you are and where do you get off doing what you're doing?" In their mind, in their dark and unbelieving mind, Jesus has no right. And there's the rub. Does Jesus have the right to tell *you* to turn the other cheek? Does Jesus have the right to tell you to forgive others as you have been forgiven? Does Jesus have the right to tell you to deny yourself, pick up your cross and follow Him? Some don't like Jesus' authority. Some prefer their own. And you? Does your sinful flesh chafe at God's commandments? Do you think that He lacks authority over you?

These religious rulers are in a fight that they cannot win. But Jesus isn't interested in winning some senseless fracas. He loves these men. He attempting to draw them to Himself. So, the Lord puts them on the spot. Jesus asks them about John's baptism; was it from heaven or from men? The religious authorities had rejected John (Luke 7:29-30). These false authorities had

rejected God's purposes for themselves and so they had rejected God's prophet, they rejected John. John called people to repent. Janitors, truck drivers, neurosurgeons, teachers, pharmacists, firemen, plumbers, electricians, nurses, grocers, home economists, and moms and dads – John the Baptist called them to repent and be baptized for the forgiveness of their sins because the Messiah was near and they had to be ready. Being ready...

We dedicated some stained-glass windows today. They're beautiful! These windows sing. These artistic jewels capture and convey a truth that is eternal and describes what is happening right now. Being ready... our Lord is going to return. The Bridegroom will arrive and all believers will be ushered into the wedding banquet. He will not come at a time that is expected or convenient, but He is coming. Joy will erupt at His return. One day, the trumpet will sound, the Lord will ride the clouds, and the banquet hall doors will be flung open. Our Lord tells a parable to give you a portrait of that day (Matthew 25:1-13). Five wise and five foolish virgins – the wise are welcomed into the banquet hall, the foolish are shut out. Did you see those windows? Did you see the expression of devotion that animated the faces of the wise? They were ready. The wise virgins were ready for the Bridegroom's arrival.

Bobbe Monk was ready. Bobbe was a devout servant of Christ the King. Oil is dispensed here. The oil of gladness, the oil of truth, the oil of the Gospel and that oil filled Bobbe's soul. She was ready. Bobbe knew Christ's authority. Bobbe knew that Jesus used His authority for her. Jesus said: "No one takes my life from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again" (John 10:18). He who rules the cosmos, He who has unending authority, used it – Jesus Christ used His authority to redeem Bobbe. He laid down His life. Crucified for our sins – bloody wounds, spikes through His holy flesh, His authority, His loving, sacrificial authority was given to Bobbe. She knew it. That reality sang in her heart. That divine truth made Bobbe wise... and devout, and humble and gracious and loving and kind. Christ's cross and empty tomb makes us wise. The beauty of the Gospel is unleashed in this Holy House. The Gospel fills our souls like oil fills a lamp. The Gospel makes us ready for our Lord's return. But we are eager for Him *now*. We sit at His feet now. We savor His riches now. His authority is here. His death and resurrection saturate this Divine Service and we become wise.

This Divine Service is a dress rehearsal for two things simultaneously. This Divine Service is a dress rehearsal for the Last Day and it is a dress rehearsal for your death. The wise see it... and rejoice. When Jesus asked his antagonists about John's baptism (whether it was heaven or from men) they lied in response. Typical of unbelief; typical of those who want to evade genuine authority; typical of those who refuse to repent; they lied. The religious rulers gamed out their potential answers and neither option appealed... so they lied. "We do not know" (Matthew 21:27). That was their answer to Jesus' question whether John's baptism was heaven or from men. So, Jesus tells a parable to highlight their faithless position. Two sons; the old man tells both to go work in the vineyard. The first son tells the old man to shove it, he ain't going. But he changed his mind and went. The second son offered mere lip service. Sure thing, old man. But he didn't go. Which son are you? Which son would you rather be?

Do you know who responded to John the Baptist's call to repent? Do you know who KNEW that they had to prepare for the Messiah's arrival, because NOT to do so would be tragic, would be

faithless and empty and loveless and foolish? The sinners – thieves and tax collectors and prostitutes – they responded. They had defied God by living in rank, gross rebellion to God's righteousness. They were the first Son who told God and His commandments, God and His grace, to "shove it." But upon hearing John, upon hearing that the Messiah was approaching, upon hearing that He came to redeem and save, those sinners repented, they were washed in the Jordan, and they gladly welcomed the Savior. The second son rejected John's call to repent. "These people honor me with their lips, but their heart is far from me" (Matthew 15:8-9). Foolish, faithless – they rejected God's purposes for themselves (Luke 7:29-30). They despise Christ's authority. They prefer darkness, they prefer emptiness, they prefer lovelessness. They will be shut out of the Marriage Banquet.

Our new windows sing. They sing of grace and devotion and salvation and heaven. The doors that we enter to come to this Divine Service have depicted in the windows around them your future. The windows depict what is taking place here, as grace is dispensed, as the lamps of our faith are filled with the oil of Christ's love. You should see them at night! Oh, they are magnificent! From our courtyard, the windows sing of the love that exists between Christ and His church. You are the wise virgins. You are ready for His return. You rejoice to be fed by the Lord of Life in this Holy House. He delights to feed you with His body and blood, with His death and resurrection. One day, the windows won't merely be a picture. One day, what they depict will be realized. We are ready. Come soon, Lord Jesus. Come with your authority and take us to heaven.