



# Kaurihohore Historic Church

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## Kaurihohore / Kamo Co-operating Parish

### Sunday 1 October 2023 –Pentecost 18

Our Service today has been prepared by Eleanor Ashby, one of our Lay Preachers

#### Welcome

#### Call to Worship

*(Based on Psalm 78: 1-4)*

We gather together to *remember*,  
to once, again tell the wonderful stories of our God—  
stories we have heard many times before,  
and passed down from generation to generation;  
stories of faithfulness and love, of mercy and compassion,  
of miracles and new life.

**We tell these stories over and over so that we don't forget.**

We tell these stories to remember who we are—people of God.

**We tell these stories so that our children and our children's children can also come to know and love the God we serve.**

Let's worship together!

#### Prayer:

Let us Pray - Loving God, Father and Mother of us all, through  
Christ Jesus your son and our brother you have gathered us  
together to worship you and to discern your will for our lives.

We pray, O God, for your wisdom to enlighten us, your judgements  
to guide us, and your love to fill us. Help us to build our lives on the foundation laid  
for us by Christ –

and may our prayer and our praise bring glory to your name. Amen.

**Hymn:** [All Hail the Power of Jesus' Name](#)

**Centering Prayer:**

Lord, for this day

**We give you thanks**

Lord, for the moments when we encountered grace and beauty

**We give you thanks**

Lord, for conversations that have made an impact on our lives

**We give you thanks**

Lord, for the times when we have seen you at work

**We give you thanks**

Lord, we remember the times when we have not shown love through our thoughts, words and actions

**We seek forgiveness**

Lord, we remember the times when we have been hurt by the words and actions of others

**Help us to forgive**

Lord, we remember the times when we have been distracted from seeking after you

**Lord, make yourself known to us, help us to see you in the midst of the noise and clamour of this world**

Lord, we pray that your Holy Spirit would guide us into the ways of righteousness

**That you would give us strength for the journey**

Lord, you know the shape of our lives at this time, you know the delights we enjoy and the pressures we endure.

**Guide us and give us wisdom to know your will, strengthen our resolve to discern your call.**

Lord, make yourself known to us in the daily pattern of our lives,

**Help us to see the fruit borne out of small actions**

Lord, build up the community of which we are part,

**And shape it around the cross of your Son Jesus Christ.**

We ask this in his name, **Amen.**

**Readings:**

Exodus 17: 1-7

Matthew 21: 23-32

Hymn: [Alleluia, Alleluia](#)

### Reflection:

In Matthew 21:23-32, Jesus is confronted by some of the highest-ranking, most powerful, and more widely influential authorities within the Judaism of his time and place. These chief priests and elders, members of a "scribal elite" class, played important and visible roles regarding religious practices, rituals and symbols, the interpretation of sacred texts, and Roman governance over the region. Jesus has not directly engaged people like this before, except for a brief encounter in Matthew 21:15-16, and the tension is high.

Authority has always been an issue in the church, Hebrew, then Christian. Those born or appointed to power always want to exert it. Those down below resist it, or challenge it. Jesus always allies himself with those down below. Not encouraging for those of us who harbour ambitions! Jesus always operates at ground level. Earthed. Even below ground level. Down in the depths! Here, religious heavies tackle Jesus. "By what authority....?" He could look them straight in the eye & say, "Well, my own actually!" But he teases them, and the issue, a bit. With a look of despair? A scowl? Or a twinkle in his eye?

Their answer to his question about John the Baptist is weak to say the least. Sounds like a lot of today's spin doctors! Jesus has them over a barrel & they know it! They taste the source of his authority, but without internalising it. Authority delegated to humans by God is never given as a control mechanism. Instead, like all else of God, it is rooted & grounded in love. Better at loosening than binding. Empowering more than limiting. Nurturing more than keeping under control. Imagining more than stifling. Those who'd gone out to John recognized genuine authority when they saw & heard it. Not the sham stuff their heavies dispensed.

Now these same leaders face Jesus & taste if not recognize his even more inherently divine authority. Jesus implicitly criticizes them for not recognizing John the Baptizer and his ministry as authorized "from heaven," that is, as expressions of God's own intentions or as means by which someone might glimpse God and God's priorities for the world. By extension, Jesus insinuates that these religious authorities also fail to recognize the same in him and in the teaching and work he does.

There is a wonderful story about a group of military leaders who succeeded in building a super computer that was able to solve any problem--large or small, strategic or tactical. These military leaders assembled in front of the new machine for a demonstration. The engineer conducting the demonstration instructed these officers to feed a difficult tactical problem into it. The military leaders proceeded to describe a hypothetical situation to the computer and then asked the pivotal question: attack or retreat? This enormous super computer hummed away for an hour and then printed out its one-word answer . . . YES.

The generals looked at each other, somewhat stupefied. Finally, one of them submits a second request to the computer: YES WHAT? Instantly the computer 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 Jesus' 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.

It was in this context that Jesus told a story about a man who had two sons. He went to the first and said, "Son, go and work today in the vineyard."

The boy immediately said, "No." Later he changed his mind and went. Then the father went to his other son and said the same thing. This one answered, "O.K." but he never got out to the vineyard...

When we read about a parable Jesus tells concerning two sons -- one who verbally refuses his father's command to work in a vineyard but later changes his mind and obeys, and another who agrees to toil in the vineyard but does not keep his promise -- we might be tempted to moralize it. We may assume its message is simply "Actions speak louder than words!" or "Don't be such a hypocrite!" or "Obey your father!"

How boring. How ineffective.

More serious: how inattentive to what's going on at this point in the Gospel according to Matthew.

In our new millennium this story seems redundant. What useful truth can it reveal to those of us who have repented and believed in Jesus? Are we not the son who finally did what his father commanded? Yet, if that were the case there would be little point in Matthew wasting precious space in his gospel recording the parable. What is the use of a pat on the back which affirms our standing before God? No, there is more to this parable than meets the eye. The parable reminds believers today that we are, in a sense, the "elder sons", and as such the disobedient son. It well may be that some outside the church are obeying the Father's will and we are not.

It's all too common that we find people whose behaviour does not match what they profess. Several idioms have arisen to give expression to this thought. We speak of someone who "talks the talk but doesn't walk the walk."

Or we say "Put your money where your mouth is"

"It's all just talk"

"Talk is cheap"

"Promises, promises"

"Practise what you preach"

What, then, does Jesus contribute to our understanding of what a well-lived life looks like? Can he help people of faith be agents of change, people who look at our fouled-up world and make differences that will benefit other people and will give voice to God's desire for human flourishing?

How then, do we apply this parable to the here and now? When it comes to obeying the Father's will, there is one act of obedience which is essential, but which is easily placed in the non-essential basket. It is easy for a believer to forget that their standing in the sight of God is totally dependent on their appropriation, by faith, of God's grace in Christ.

Because if God is active or discoverable in the efforts of someone like John, a wild-eyed long-toiling prophet who sets up camp in the wilderness calling for a new world to come into being, a world marked by justice, changed lives, and a recognition that God intends for more than just the continuation of an ongoing and corrosive status quo...then perhaps people who care about religious language, symbols, practices, and truth claims should be curious people, bent on keeping their eyes open for ways in which God might be made known, or ways in which the purposes of God might be expressed.

In other words, saying "Yes" to God should lead a person to say "Yes" to looking for God and "Yes" to getting engaged in God's business -- the business of seeing to the flourishing of justice, peace, reconciliation, security, restoration, and forgiveness.

That's why Jesus, in his parable and in his words immediately after it, praises "tax collectors and prostitutes" -- people who by most appearances have not claimed to say "Yes" to God but have nevertheless responded to or found their place within God's activity.

A belief that our standing before God is maintained and advanced by a faithful attention to the law of God, can easily undermine our initial "yes" for Jesus. We can easily come to believe that our appropriation of God's promised blessings, is ours by obedience to Christ. This way of thinking undermines our salvation, for as we have read, it is "by grace are you saved, not by works, lest anyone should boast." The initial "yes" for the journey of faith, can be undermined if we get into the business of winning brownie-points from God. So, let us take care that we haven't said "yes", but have then forgotten the Father's will.

If we are trusting in our own goodness to make us acceptable to God, we are sadly deluded. I may be someone who is seen in the right places, avoids the wrong places, and is quietly proud of my own record of good deeds, but in the end, this is not enough to cut the mustard. It is all too easy for us to act like the younger son in the story who said "Yes, dad" and then neglected to put his confession into action. It is much easier to have fine words about serving God and serving people than to roll our sleeves up and inconvenience ourselves by actually *doing* something. That younger son would have been better to have said nothing. His willing words created an expectation of action that only led to disappointment. Likewise, we may profess Christian faith only to disappoint others by the way we act or fail to act.

The moral of the story is, it is better for our faith to be seen in what we do, than heard in what we say. Where we do make a profession of faith it must be matched by actions. It's not what we say we believe, but how we act that is of greatest importance. Amen

**Hymn:** [When I Needed a Neighbour](#)

**Offering Dedication:**

**Community Time:**

**Prayer for Others:**

God,

like the Israelites in the wilderness, we too have known Your love, and experienced Your care and provision.

You invite us to extend that love to the world around us—to care for others as deeply as we care for ourselves.

And so we bring the needs of our world before You now.

In Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for the many who do not have enough:

enough food to eat, or shelter to keep warm;

enough employment, or money to pay their bills;

enough medicine or medical care.

Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We also pray for those who have more than enough, but who still struggle to find meaning and purpose in life;

who indulge in dangerous or self-serving activities to dull their pain or loneliness.

Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

God, Your grace reaches out to all of us.

You call us to live as citizens of heaven, working together with one heart and mind.

Strengthen us to live in a manner worthy of the Good News we have received, offering our lives in service of Your kingdom,

where the last are first, and the first are last and there is grace enough for all.

Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

In the name of Jesus Christ, our Saviour and Lord, **Amen.**

Hymn: [Rejoice the Lord is King](#)

**Commission & Benediction:**

*(Based on Exodus 17:1-7, Philippians 2:1-13)*

Go now to will and to work for God's purposes.

Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus.

Be filled with the same love and look to the interests of others.

With reverence for God, work out your salvation.

And may God quench your thirst with love and consolation;

May Christ Jesus strengthen you and encourage you;

And may the Holy Spirit lead you on and make your joy complete.

**We go in peace to love and serve the Lord,**

Threefold Amen.