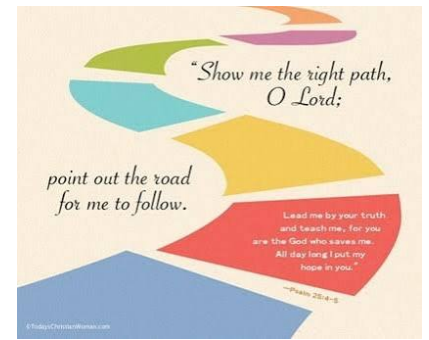


Dorset South & West Circuit. Written Service.
Sunday September 27th 2026. 'Choosing the right path.'
Prepared by Revd Jean Quick.

Call to Worship. Show me your ways, Lord, teach me your paths.
Guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my Saviour,
and my hope is in you all day long. Psalm 25



STF 455

All my hope on God is founded;
he doth still my trust renew.
Me through change and chance he guideth,
only good and only true.
God unknown,
he alone
calls my heart to be his own.

Human pride and earthly glory,
sword and crown betray our trust;
what with care and toil we fashion,
tower and temple, fall to dust.
But God's power,
hour by hour,
is my temple and my tower.

God's great goodness aye endureth,
deep his wisdom passing thought;
splendour, light, and life attend him,
beauty springeth out of nought.

Evermore
from his store
new-born worlds rise and adore.

Daily doth the almighty giver
bounteous gifts on us bestow;
his desire our soul delighteth,
pleasure leads us where we go.
Love doth stand
apt his hand;
joy doth wait on his command.

Still from earth to God eternal
sacrifice of praise be done,
high above all praises praising
for the gift of Christ his Son.
Christ doth call
one and all:
ye who follow shall not fall.

Prayers of adoration and confession (Based on Psalm 25:1)

To You, O Lord, we lift up our souls in praise and adoration. You alone are worthy of our highest praise. From the depths of our being we turn our gaze upward, fixing our eyes upon Your beauty, Your holiness, Your steadfast love. You are the God who receives the soul that comes empty handed, the One who is never diminished by our need nor exhausted by our worship. All glory, honour, and adoration belong to You. We lift up our souls to You in praise and thanksgiving, not because we are worthy, but because You are infinitely worthy. **Amen**

To you, O Lord, we come in sorrow and regret for the times we are too consumed with ourselves to notice your holiness reflected in the splendour of creation all around us. We are too slow to offer words of kindness or gratitude to those we meet. Too busy with our own desires to act on your behalf of your goodness to others and too quick to act in ways that are the very opposite of your way of loving. Forgive us and make us more mindful and proactive as your people. **Amen**

Bible reading: Matthew 21: 23-32,

Jesus entered the temple courts, and, while he was teaching, the chief priests and the elders of the people came to him. 'By what authority are you doing these things?' they asked. 'And who gave you this authority?'

Jesus replied, 'I will also ask you one question. If you answer me, I will tell you by what authority I am doing these things. John's baptism where did it come from? Was it from heaven, or of human origin?'

They discussed it among themselves and said, 'If we say, "From heaven", he will ask, "Then why didn't you believe him?" But if we say, "Of human origin" we are afraid of the people, for they all hold that John was a prophet.' So they answered Jesus, 'We don't know.' Then he said, 'Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things. 'What do you think? There was a man who had two sons. He went to the first and said,

“Son, go and work today in the vineyard.” “I will not,” he answered, but later he changed his mind and went. Then the father went to the other son and said the same thing. He answered, “I will, sir,” but he did not go. Which of the two did what his father wanted? ‘The first,’ they answered. Jesus said to them, ‘Truly I tell you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you. For John came to you to show you the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes did. And even after you saw this, you did not repent and believe him.’

Reflection

The Question of Authority? I don't think many of us warm to being told what to do and having what we thought was good enough being turned upside down and rejected. I used to tell wedding couples at their rehearsal a silly joke, so they would get past the nerves and relax. It went like this: To the bride, “as you walk towards your future husband on your wedding day, think about these things. Think about the aisle you're walking down, then look towards the altar and finally think about the hymns you have chosen and say to yourself, *“I'll alter him”*, *“I'll alter him”*. It never failed to raise a laugh and relax everyone. However it's a joke and not something to take seriously. Think too long about it and it's definitely the opposite of the vows that are going to be exchanged. Sadly too often couples fall foul of trying to be too authoritarian in their relationship and the love between them fails. We like to be valued and respected for who we are and not questioned about our actions or words.

In our bible passage today, Jesus has just entered Jerusalem. He has cleansed the temple, overturning the tables of the money changers and is driving out those who were turning the house of prayer into a marketplace. The religious leaders are furious. They confront Him: “By what authority are you doing these things?”

They are not asking out of genuine curiosity. They are trying to trap Him. If He claims divine authority, they can accuse Him of blasphemy. If He claims human authority, they can dismiss Him as a pretender. Jesus responds with a question of His own, one that exposes their hearts. “The baptism of John, was it from heaven or from man?”

They are caught. If they say “from heaven,” they condemn themselves for rejecting John. If they say “from man,” they risk the anger of the people who regarded John as a prophet. So they answer with the safest and most dishonest reply: “We do not know.” Jesus refuses to play their game. He will not give them the answer they demand because their question was never sincere. A French Moraliste once wrote, “Almost all your faults are more pardonable than the methods you think up to hide them.” Do we play those games? We know we are wrong and we just don't want to admit it, or have our ways or words questioned. So we find ways to evade explanations. Although Jesus refused to answer their question instead he tells them a story about Two Sons. It's one we can warm too and probably have plenty of past experiences of being one son or the other. We have said no and changed our minds and done what we should, or we have said yes, but not followed through.

This is a simple story. A father asks his two sons to work in the vineyard. The first son says, “I will not.” He is blunt, rebellious, even rude. But later he changes his mind and goes. The second son says, “I will go, sir.” He is polite, respectful, outwardly compliant. But he never goes. Jesus asks the leaders: “Which of the two did the will of his father?” They answer correctly: the first.

Then comes the sting. Jesus applies the parable directly to them. The tax collectors and prostitutes, people the religious leaders despised as moral failures are entering the kingdom of God ahead of them. Why? Because when John came preaching repentance, the “sinners” believed him and turned to God for forgiveness. The religious leaders saw the same evidence and refused to change their minds. The first son represents those who initially resist God but later repents and obeys. The second son represents those who speak the right religious language, appear respectful, and yet never actually do the Father's will.

Time for another funny story. A Mother goes into her son's bedroom and tells him to get up he'll be late for church. “I'm not going,” he replies. The mother questions why? “They don't like me and I don't want to go” The son replied, as he pulled himself deeper into his bedclothes. The mother pulling back the covers says, “two reasons why you're going, you're 47, not 6 and you're their Minister!”. Oh! dear. 🙄 Those in Ministry have an obligation to minister, no matter how they feel. Their actions and authority are always under scrutiny and more importantly they are God's representatives. A weighty role to hold. This parable cuts through religious performance. Not just for religious leaders but for all who say they follow the way of Christ. It is possible to

say all the right words “Yes, Lord” and still never enter the vineyard. It is possible to look obedient while remaining disobedient in the places that matter. There’s a story about an employer who has to let his lazy employee go. He likes the fellow and wants to write an encouraging but honest reference for him. So he writes, ‘if you get Joe to work for you, you will be extremely fortunate. Yours truly....’ I wonder what God’s reference would read like for us? We make lots of promises, some rash, some impulsive. Do we get around to what we promised?

Have you ever come across a round tuit? It’s an idea that was devised in the late 20th century as a play on words for procrastination. “I will do it when I get around to it”.

God is not impressed by our polite refusals dressed up as piety. He is not fooled by religious language that never becomes action. What He desires is a heart that, even after saying “no,” turns and goes.

Notice the order Jesus highlights. The tax collectors and prostitutes “go into the kingdom of God before *you*.” He does not say the religious leaders are permanently excluded. There is still room for repentance. But priority belongs to those who respond in faith and obedience, not to those who merely claim the right credentials.

John came “in the way of righteousness.” He called people to repent and prepare for the coming of the Messiah. The “sinners” heard that call and believed. The leaders heard it and hardened their hearts. Even after seeing the transformation in others’ lives, they still would not change their minds.

Where do we stand in this story? Some of us may identify with the first son. We have said “no” to God—sometimes loudly, sometimes quietly. We have resisted His call in areas of our lives. But by His grace, we have changed our minds. We have begun to go into the vineyard. If that is you, take heart. The Father receives the son who turns and obeys. Others of us may feel closer to the second son. We have said the right words for years. We know the language of faith. We speak of commitment. But in the quiet places of our hearts, there are areas where we have never actually gone into the vineyard. We have promised obedience without delivering it. Jesus is not interested in our religious performance. He is looking for the one who does the will of the Father.

What is that will? It begins with believing the message of repentance and faith that John proclaimed and that Jesus fulfils. It continues in daily obedience, not perfect obedience, but genuine turning toward the Father’s work. The question remains: Which son are we? Will we continue saying “I go, sir” while staying where we are? Or will we, even if we once said “no,” change our minds and go? The kingdom of God is not entered by those who talk the best talk. It is entered by those who, by God’s grace, do the Father’s will. May we be found among them.

STF 416

There's a wideness in God's mercy
like the wideness of the sea;
there's a kindness in his justice
which is more than liberty.

For the love of God is broader
than the measures of the mind;
and the heart of the Eternal
is most wonderfully kind.

There is plentiful redemption
in the blood that has been shed;
there is joy for all the members
in the sorrows of the Head.

But we make his love too narrow
by false limits of our own;
and we magnify his strictness
with a zeal he will not own.

3

There is grace enough for thousands
of new worlds as great as this;
there is room for fresh creations
in that upper home of bliss.

If our love were but more simple
we should take him at his word;
and our lives would be illumined
by the presence of our Lord.

Prayers of Intercession *Based on Matthew 21:23–32*

We pray for the Church: Lord Jesus, You who teach with true authority, look upon Your Church. Forgive us when we say “Yes, Lord” with our lips but do not enter the vineyard with our lives. Grant us the grace of the first son: that we may change our minds, turn from empty words, and do the will of our Father. Make us a people who believe, repent, and obey, so that tax collectors and outcasts may see in us the living evidence of Your kingdom.

Lord, in Your mercy, hear our prayer.

We pray for those who feel far from God. Merciful Father, You welcome the one who first said “No” but afterward went. We pray for all who have resisted Your call. For those weighed down by failure, shame, or wrong doing. Open their ears to the voice of Jesus who called those considered outcasts and sinners. Give them courage to change their minds, and bring them into Your kingdom. **Lord, in Your mercy, hear our prayer.**

We pray for leaders in the Church and the world. God of truth, the chief priests and elders would not answer You honestly. We pray for all in positions of influence and authority. For all in Ministry, for teachers, for those in government; local and national. For all who have positions of responsibility and power in industry and for those who govern the nations. Deliver them from the fear of the crowd and the love of reputation. Give them humble hearts that recognise Your authority, and the integrity to speak and act according to Your will rather than human approval.
Lord, in Your mercy, hear our prayer.

We pray for true obedience among us. Father in heaven, Your Son asked, “Which of the two did the will of his father?” Search us and know us. Where we have spoken pleasing words without corresponding action, encourage us to repent. Where we have already begun to go into the vineyard, strengthen our steps. Form in us the obedience that is not mere politeness but costly, joyfully doing of Your will.

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

We say the Lord’s Prayer.

STF 345

And can it be that I should gain
an interest in the Saviour’s blood?
Died he for me, who caused his pain?
For me, who him to death pursued?
Amazing love! How can it be
that you, my God, should die for me?
Amazing love! How can it be
that you, my God, should die for me?

2. What mystery here! The Immortal dies!
Who can explore his strange design?
In vain the highest angel tries
to sound the depths of love divine!
What mercy this! Let earth adore;
let angel minds enquire no more.
What mercy this! Let earth adore;
let angel minds enquire no more.

3. He left his Father’s throne above-
so free, so infinite his grace-
humbled himself in all his love
and bled for Adam’s helpless race.

What mercy this, immense and free,
for, O my God, it found out me!
What mercy this, immense and free,
for, O my God, it found out me!

4. Long my imprisoned spirit lay
fast bound in sin and nature’s night:
then shone your glorious gospel ray;
I woke! The dungeon flamed with light!
My chains fell off; my heart was new,
I rose, went forth and followed you!
My chains fell off; my heart was new,
I rose, went forth and followed you!

5. No condemnation now I dread!
Jesus, and all in him, is mine!
Alive in him, my living head,
and clothed in righteousness divine,
bold I approach the eternal throne
and claim the crown, through Christ my own;
bold I approach the eternal throne
and claim the crown, through Christ my own.

The Blessing

Heavenly Father, We bless You for the authority of Jesus, which comes from heaven. Bless every heart that receives Him and turns from disobedience to true obedience. Like the son who first said “No” but later did his father’s will, give us willing and faithful hearts. Let our “Yes” to You be matched by action, and establish us in Your will.

In Jesus’ name, **Amen.**

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