

## Sermon

National Day For Truth and Reconciliation/Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Church of the Ascension, Ottawa

The Reverend Victoria Scott

Readings: [EXODUS 17:1-7](#); [PSALM 78:1-4, 12-16](#); [PHILIPPIANS 2:1-13](#); [MATTHEW 21:23-32](#)

“Where there’s a will, there’s a way” – an old English proverb that I’ve always struggled with a bit, even though I’m a fairly determined person. Sometimes when I hear “where there’s a will there’s a way” I think: Really? I look around and I see that sometimes we don’t have the will. Sometimes – often times! – there is a clashing of wills in our world. Sometimes we lose our way...

Our readings this week tell us that where there’s a will, there’s a way. Not mind over matter, though. The will is found not in steely determination of mind, but rather in a change of *heart* – a change in what we care about. The way is a path that Jesus makes before us, and with us.

In our reading from Exodus, the Israelites doubt the way, and lose their will to continue. Their fear that God isn’t with them – that God won’t provide and the apparent scarcity around them – that fear has undermined their will to continue, and it sets them along a way of doubt, and complaining. Then, the Israelites are reminded that the resources are around them.

The resources are around us, too. God is working and moving among us, asking us to see that work and movement, and to join in. A willingness to look for God working and moving among us already is part of how we find both our will and our way as followers of Jesus.

Our Gospel passage today begins with priests and elders questioning Jesus’s authority – but they are really questioning his way.

It’s important to note the context of today’s Gospel passage. Earlier in this chapter, Jesus enters Jerusalem. This is his second day in the temple: he’s already overturned the money changers’ tables the day before – that’s what has caught the attention of the priests and elders. Jesus is upsetting their way with a new way. Their way is one of power and status. A “who’s in/who’s out” way of life. They are driven by a will to maintain that power, and their sense of authority.

Philosopher Bernard Loomer spoke of two kinds of power: unilateral and relational. Jesus rules by relationship and empathy, breaking down barriers between human and divine. Jesus's power produces healing and reconciliation rather than alienation and violence. This is an unfamiliar kind of power for the priests and elders, and their gut reaction is to question it. They attempt to shut it down with a power play, a challenge designed to result in a winner (them) and a loser (Jesus) with their question about authority. Jesus's clever response – answering a question with a question – sidesteps that win/lose situation. Jesus isn't interested in winners and losers. Jesus is all about God's will, and a way of love.

Our Gospel passage moves from power and authority to a parable of two sons and a change of mind. We're invited to see that sometimes those we consider sinners can end up being the most faithful. The living word for us is an invitation to ask ourselves "What change of mind is God calling us to?" There is an invitation to ask ourselves "What pang of regret might help us to chart a new way forward?" "How is God challenging us to change our cares, to reset our priorities, to rearrange what most concerns us?" How do these questions influence our will? What is the way, with Jesus, to answer these questions?

Jesus's way of inclusivity, connection, compassion, and justice can be our way, as Christians. If we choose it. If we commit, and re-commit to love and compassion and justice when we lose our will or our way.

The will and way have to do with how we see God. The question "Do you believe in God?" is less important than the question "What kind of God do you believe in?" The God that Jesus brings us is a God of love and compassion. A God of solidarity: with us, in good times and in bad. A God urging us forward, wanting abundance and flourishing for us. A God of second chances. A God with a vision that anyone can say yes to, and a path in Christ that anyone can follow, at any time.

Jesus's way was not the way of the society he lived in. Jesus's way – a way of radical inclusivity and hospitality, a way of compassion, a way of justice – is all too often not the way of our society either.

This was not the way of Residential Schools. It has not been the way between settlers and the Indigenous Peoples of this country.

Today we observe National Day for Truth and Reconciliation. This is a day when we are called to lament our history and parts of our present in Canada. It's a day when we are called to reflect on the recommendations, calls to action, reports, and laws that are part of reconciliation in this country.

These things are part of the change that needs to happen, but it's our perspective that has to change. It is our relationships. It's our sense of self and other, and how we relate to one another and to our world – that has to change.

In the podcast I mentioned last week – “The One You Feed” – Richard Rohr spoke of a middle way. This middle way isn't about balancing opposite views, it's not about wrestling with them until one is decided upon. It's about holding both views, and letting the opposites stretch us until we see a new way. The reports, recommendations and calls to action that are part of reconciliation with our Indigenous siblings will stretch us if we are willing to hold the weight of them – if we let them stretch our will and show us a new way...

Believing in a loving, generous, forgiving God makes a difference to our will. Willing ourselves into action out of fear is a very different experience – a very different way – than when we respond out of love.

And so, where there's a will to see God as love, there's a way of empathy, solidarity with the other. When we see God as love, it fosters a will that is creative, and transforming, making a way of compassion, justice, and love.

In a few minutes we will share in a ritual, tying orange shirts and red dresses to our prayer net. May this outward gesture be a symbol of the inner stretching that we are invited into as we seek new relationships with our Indigenous siblings, as we seek truth and reconciliation in this country. May it be a reminder that a God of love is with us – with all of us – inviting us to let that love guide our wills and show us a way of relationship and connection, a way of solidarity and peace and justice. A way of love.

When we come together to worship like this, it is to be reminded that where there is a will to be motivated by relational power rather than unilateral power there is a way of love. Where there a will to be stretched, there is a way of change and

transformation – a way of reconciliation – for us and our world. Where there is a will there *is* a way – a way of love, in Jesus name. Amen.