

-Abby and I, with the incredible help and craftsmanship of Adrian Hoye, are converting a bedroom into a bathroom in our house. Because of this, both of us have gotten swept up (more than usual I would say) with noticing other people's bathrooms designs, and watching HGTV. I am sure many of you have done construction projects before or helped your friends or parents do one. I'll have to say, being a "newbie" to this whole thing, I never quite expected to get so swept up into the world of bathrooms. Here's the thing: once you are in this world, what becomes normal maybe is not normal. For example, Abby and I (who are on a pretty strict budget for this bathroom) go to Mountain Water Supply to buy two bathroom faucets and a shower kit (shower head, temperature handle, etc). I had it in my head and was determined that we were just on the lookout for a basic faucet and showerhead, but after conversation with the sales guy that started to change. Because, you see, a better quality chrome is in this faucet for \$300 and what you really need is this cool rainhead for \$400. You don't need just one shower head, you should have two...and so on.. So after this, Abby and I walk out of this store with a quote in hand of about \$1500 which we thought, well, our bathroom needs to be good quality and impress. In comes Adrain Hoye who takes one look at this quote and says: "No. Welcome back to Earth. You don't need to spend that kind of money on a shower head." He was right, and thank God we didn't.

-Once again this week, we have a challenging gospel text with Jesus talking to "the Chief Priests and Elders" about authority using an interesting story of two vineyard workers, both promising to go work in the field but only one actually doing it. This is Jesus sparing no punches and pointedly criticizing the leadership in what it is doing. - "Truly I tell you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are going into the kingdom of God ahead of you." Ouch.

-One of the things that makes this text hard for me, maybe for you too, is I feel somewhat of a guilt complex when Jesus is calling these priests out. Let's be honest, I represent the "priestly/pastor class" of our time. Many of us are on the side of leadership and privilege versus prostitution and tax collecting. I haven't sold all of my belongings to the poor, I am not living in a mobile home touring around doing mission work. I have a full-time job with health insurance, a house with a mortgage, and soon a new bathroom too.

-So, my question this week is what is Jesus getting at in this text and what can his pointed language at the Chief Priests and Elders mean for us in places of privilege.

-I think Jesus' story of the two sons in the vineyard and language in the second section of this text greatly connects with the Chief Priests and Elders question on authority and response to Jesus' poking.

-You see, Jesus is cleverly bringing up an issue that we know divided many Jewish leaders. It's kinda like what we are seeing in the fraying of today's political parties: there were several issues such as the afterlife, baptism, and fasting that Sadducees and

Pharisees (the two main leadership groups of ancient Judaism) came down on in very different ways. It is certainly obvious here that they would much rather not address this issue of baptism, so they do this weird political dance in order to stay on the “good side” of the crowd and keep their power.

-This action of keeping power and staying in their own world gets more and more intense until they get so deep in it that the only way forward is killing Jesus and getting rid of him. It becomes that their world of power and leadership gets so warped by this front of “keeping power and leadership” that the norms of life become governed by it and not by reality or even by the values of one’s own faith tradition. It becomes a world where one actually believes a reality that buying a \$2,500 faucet is normal.

-We all have fronts we put up, let’s face it. Let me stick with the house imagery and call it: curb appeal. We all like curb appeal. We work hard to look like we have it all together: plan for the future, kids doing well in school, nice and tidy house, being able to go on adventures and live out the “Montana outdoor lifestyle”. Our curb appeal in how we relate to one another is important to us, I know it is for me.

-As it turns out the more monetary resources and leadership power you have, the more you can bury yourself in your own curb appeal. So why do the prostitutes and tax collectors get to God first before the religious elite? I don’t think it’s simply because the religious elite are just wealthy and not sharing, I think it goes much deeper than that. I think it’s because they are so deep and isolated in their curb appeal that all they can think of is fancy showerheads. The prostitute on the other hand, has no resources or power. Infact she is occupying the lowest rung on the social ladder, the cast away. Her curb appeal is not great. What you see is what you get.

-Think about this: the prostitute has so little to lose, that her word is probably almost always...true. She’ll show up to dinner at Jesus’ invite. She’ll share what she can with others. She’ll even try to follow Jesus’ example of grace. She is the lowest of the low, but she is able to get out of her front and be authentic....be the way God created her to be.

-For me, this story challenges all of us in being authentic. When the call comes from Christ to get out of our world of curb appeal, how do we respond?

-Today we are celebrating the end of a summer long campaign in raising funds for what has turned out to be a water well project in Cambodia. I have heard from many of you how meaningful this project has been. It all started with someone in our congregation being so moved by images of water during our lenten soup dinner presentations that they wanted to launch this project and see where it would go. It then was the task of each person giving maybe a little bit extra in order to raise funds for *one* \$2500 well, and then we kept going and raised funds for *two* \$2,500 water wells. And then we raised \$600 dollars on top of that! Truly, this campaign seemed to hit a nerve and get us a little out of ourselves.

-So that's what we are celebrating today. Not the money, but the authentic getting out of ourselves. Getting out of our curb-appeal.

-This can be the church at it's best- a community reminding and helping each other to be authentic and love the neighbor.

-I got a thank you note following our Superfund Run event this last spring with the Bonner School kids. This teacher wrote to me: "Thank you so much, Our Saviors, for your incredible support and display of community leadership. In my own life, sometimes I have felt churches are just buildings standing isolated from their surroundings. You are a church that has remembered it's community- especially its youth and children. For that I thank you."

-That's the message Jesus, I think, is trying to get at with the priests and elders. That's the calling. To remember, sometimes inspite of ourselves. May we have the courage to continue to remember, to break free of our curb appeal, and be radically transformed by authentic love and grace of the neighbor. Amen.