

## Sermon- A Time To Speak

Scripture: John 7: 10-19

Sunday, May 20, 2018

Last Sunday we looked at one of those rare interactions recorded in the Bible between Jesus and his immediate family members. I had pointed out that, that interaction gave us an informative view into how to treat family members who may not get what God is calling you to do and give you advice that may be well meaning not may not always be helpful. Two governing attitudes from Jesus' example, gentleness and wisdom. You got to see Jesus take the advice of his family, filtered it against the advice of his heavenly father, see what parts of it were appropriate and what parts had to be changed, especially when it came to the matter of timing. And finally, I had said that in the end his family was a critical mission field for Jesus and for us as well and something we can never write off, right? So given all that, where we had left of last Sunday, Jesus had told his brothers that it was not the appropriate time for him to go to Judea to celebrate the Festival of Shelters and that they should proceed without him. And that is exactly what his brothers did. Today, we are going to see what happens next in the story.

What happens next is this. After Jesus' family proceeds for the festival, Jesus puts on a disguise and also travels to the festival himself. Jesus of course does this many times during his ministry where he knows he is in danger or if he just needs some alone time. Even today's celebrities disguise themselves if they don't want to be troubled by fans. The scripture does not tell us how Jesus makes himself unrecognizable, but I believe if he could walk on water he could change his face or just make people not recognize him by doing a perception miracle. Whatever his method, Jesus manages to walk around incognito right in the middle of Jerusalem where there is a lot of buzz about Jesus. The Jewish authorities there were actively trying to investigate his whereabouts so that they can arrest him and the regular people are abuzz with opinions about Jesus. You have to

remember that not too long ago 12,000 people were miraculously fed by Jesus and so many of those same people were in those crowds. People who had wanted to make him king but were disappointed by his hard teachings and the fact that he would not go along with their plans.

So given the history of either their direct experience or things they were told about Jesus already you can imagine the Jesus conversations taking place in the crowds. Some people were saying, yes Jesus was a really good person, an awesome prophet actually who can do some amazing miracles like Elijah or even Moses. But other people were saying that he was a real big deceiver who was fooling the people. There were strong opinions on both sides. But there is something you need to know about crowd dynamics. Usually when one or two very vocal negative critics speak loudly, that negativity quickly snow balls and it forms a negative wave. And negative waves have a lot of momentum. So if there are people who have contrary opinions to the wave, they don't vocalize it for fear of standing up in the face of a tsunami. But when that happens, the contrary view is not vocalized and the perception created is that, no contrary view exists. This phenomenon has been observed even in today's social media with all kinds of things from cyber bullying to negative product reviews on Amazon. This phenomenon is called the Tyranny of the Vocal. In Jesus case, clearly the voices that were free to express themselves were the negative voices. Those who thought Jesus was a good man did not want to place themselves in front of the wrath of a mob and so they stayed quite. What primed the pump of negative opinion was the fact that everybody knew that the religious leaders were not happy with Jesus. So in the end you have this negative wave of opinion about Jesus sweeping through the crowds as Jesus walks among them incognito.

But there is a powerful irony to this scene like many scenes describes in the Gospel of John and I want you to see it here. Remember that these crowds are all gathered to celebrate the Festival of Shelters. Now to us, Festival of shelters may not mean

anything. But the Festival of Shelters was one of three of the most important festivals on the Jewish calendar. These top three festivals were known as the pilgrimage festivals because you were expected to go to Jerusalem to celebrate it. This Festival is also called the Festival of the Tabernacles or even just festival of booths. This festival coincided with harvest time and what they did was that during this time, Moses has said when you go out to harvest the crops, you had to make these tents and stay on the threshing floor. It worked well for the harvest season but the idea was that the fragile dwellings were to act as a reminder to the people of Israel of the kind of dwellings their ancestors lived in when they roamed in the wilderness for 40 years. The reason they survived was because they were completely depending on the will of God. And so dependence on the will of God was what the Festival of Shelters was all about. Now put this fact into the mix and see if you can see the irony of the situation. People from all over are in Jerusalem to celebrate the Jewish people's history of dependence on the will of God. And there in the crowd, these people are either feeding a negative wave of opinion about the incarnate God or staying out of the way at least in public. I am not trying to diss the crowd. It is very difficult to buck a whole negative wave. If you or I were there we would not have done anything differently. But I do want you to absorb the irony of what these people were there to celebrate, a wonderful harvest and a reminder of their dependence on the will of God. And what they were doing is anything but that. They were fueling gossip about the son of God and loudly denouncing him as a fraud and deceiver of the people which was in those days merited the death penalty.

Let's turn to Jesus now. He is there walking in their midst unrecognizable for now. The festival of Shelters is a 7 day celebration. The Bible says midway through this, so maybe on the 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> day, Jesus somehow gets to the eye of the storm, right there in the temple and starts to preach. Just a context note here, in case you are wondering. In those days there were no standard liturgy and fixed preachers. All the religious leaders would sit in the front row and anyone of them who was so moved could ask to go up

and expound some piece of scripture. Usually they were rabbi's but you actually did not need to be a qualified rabbi to do this. If you felt you were able to preach on a particular scripture you would request to speak and they would let you come forward and preach. That is how Jesus entered synagogues and even the main temple and was able to preach. And you know this. When Jesus spoke, he presented his thoughts with great care and authority. And people hearing him are taken aback by his depth of knowledge, and the authority with which he speaks the word of God. You see when you are preaching about God, it is different from other fields. You can fake a lecture in many fields especially if the students are beginners and don't know the field. But you can't fake it when you are teaching about God. Especially to the genuine seekers. If you are faking it, your words will be like paint peeling off the walls. They just won't stick and it will look pretty ugly. On the other hand when people who have walked with God their words make a mysterious but powerful impact. I remember hearing the Chinese evangelist brother Yun when he spoke at Colonial Presbyterian church. Even though I was not physically present I watched him on youtube. Even though he was speaking through a translator his words had so much power that one of my students gave his life to Christ that day.

So you can imagine what it but sound like when Jesus himself was doing the preaching. Of course God willing you and I will get to experience this one day. But that day in the middle of the festival of shelters even though Jesus did not go to an official Rabbinical school, people were so amazed at Jesus preaching that they were asking, how does this man know so much when he wasn't trained?

And Jesus tells them, that the source and depth of his insight is not from himself but from God who sent him. Jesus never loses an opportunity to direct people's eyes to his heavenly Father. Then he tells them something very interesting. He says, "anyone who wants to do the will of God will know whether my teaching is from God or merely my own." So what Jesus is sayings is that he expects people to test his own words. And

when you do, you will be able to recognize the source of those words, if you are truly seeking to do God's will. This is what Heb 11:6 says, "He is the rewarder of those who diligently seek him". On the other hand Jesus says, if the preacher is speaking of his own authority, they his end goal is to simply honor himself. Actually Jesus said this because that is exactly what the rabbis were doing in Jesus time. Each of them had their own followers who followed their interpretation of scripture and they honored each other on ever occasion forgetting about who is supposed to be getting the honor in scripture.

So Jesus presented two tests in his sermon. One is the speaker test. If the speaker is pointing to himself as the authority then he is only trying to honor himself and not God. But Jesus also presents the listener test. He says that if you are really wanting to follow God's will then you will be able to discern the true source of the speakers authority and take the content of his message seriously.

I also want to mention something that comes up very often when Jesus speaks. Jesus presents the hard hitting truth without sugar coating it. He tells the crowd, "Moses gave you the law but none of you obeys it. In fact" Jesus adds, "you are trying to kill me". Pretty hard stuff to tell people who are celebrating their dependence on the will of God.

Three things in Jesus' sermon that day. The speaker test, the listener test and if the speaker is from God and the listener is trying to do God's will then the truth can be as hard as it gets, it should not matter right?

Ok so how do we apply, the lessons from Jesus' visit to Jerusalem during the festival of booths in our own lives.

Well, firstly I believe we should always be on the look out for the silencing dynamic and we very aware of the tyranny of the vocal. The enemy wants to silence the truth in a church, on the street, on scial media, anywhere that people gather. And everytime we

are in such an environment we have to be praying for God to show us when and how to speak.

Secondly, when we do speak, we have to clarify intentions of both speaker and listener. As a speaker, we have to hollow out our own egos and asking God to take over so that the words out of our mouth are not ours but God's. But we also have to speak in a way that clarifies the motives of our listeners. Why should they listen to these words? The purpose of your speaking is always to clarify God's will. Of course people don't want to be preached to all the time so we have to be mindful of the time and place and when we sense that it is the time to speak up we do it to clarify God's will and we do it with his authority and not our own.

Finally, we have to remember that sometimes we will be called to break the silence with some pretty hard truth. When that happens, always look to how Jesus does it. Jesus loved those who he shared the truth with and his end goal was to bless and save. And if we share the truth with love as our motive, we don't have to water down the truth.

Discern the tyranny of the vocal, ask God for wisdom of where and when to speak, clarify motives and speak the truth in love. As a child of God, you could be called to act in this manner at any time. May each of us be always ready to speak up for God when God requires this of us. And may each of us bring glory to God both in our speaking and in our silence. Let us pray.