

In the Gospel of Matthew today Jesus begins by telling a mini-parable. He uses it to illustrate his assessment of the people around him in his day. He uses the example of children sitting in the marketplace trying to convince each other what game to play. One group wants to play a happy festival game with music and dancing and the rest won't play. Others want to play a sad funeral game with wailing and mourning and they can't convince anyone to join them either.

How many times have we heard children say, "Nah, I don't want to play that. I'm bored." The mom or dad says, "Look, you can build something with blocks, you can go for a hike, we can bake some cookies." "Nah. I don't want to do any of those things," the child says, "Can I watch TV?"

In that situation it's easy for the parents to see what the child cannot see. There is a lifetime's worth of activities to take part in, a lifetime's worth of things to learn, to do, and to be a happier, more fulfilled person.

And for us, Jesus, can see what WE can't see. We are like those children in his parable. Jesus is frustrated and says, "There is John the Baptist standing there in front of you showing the way to repentance, cleansing, and the start of a new life. Take the opportunity." And Jesus says to us, "And here am I, standing right in front of you offering the Kingdom of Heaven; hope, acceptance and love." And he goes on, "Take the chance on opening a new door, or open the door wider."

The view we have in front of us is of Jesus, Truth incarnate. There are only a few places in the Gospel when Jesus is angry, frustrated or confrontational. This is one of them.

The point of this passage is to **accuse** the people of Jesus' day of being fickle, unwilling to listen, dishonest with God and with themselves; closed-minded to God's message and messengers. Whether in Jesus day and age or now, our world today is in a very similar place. This is an extraordinary time. Several important truths are staring us in the face. And they both paralyze us with fear, and make us want to run away from them.

There can be no doubt. This year, 2020, will be a year that we remember for the rest of our lives. As we are very painfully aware, we are living through the twin pandemics of the coronavirus and the national awakening to the still persistent violence against people of color; the racism that still exists in these United States.

We will remember that this year was the year we had no basketball or baseball in the spring and early summer.

We will remember that this is the year that we started having services outside the church on the lawn because we don't feel safe in the church to be close to one another at this moment.

We will remember this as the year that we had to stop physically receiving Holy Communion because we want to stay healthy and and make sure that others stay healthy too.

And on this July 4th weekend this is the first time in quite a while, we have had no public fireworks display across the street at Lime Rock Park.

But will we also remember this as a year of standing up in truth to the terrible inequitable treatment of people in our country?

Will we also remember that this is the year that we stayed home to not only keep ourselves safe, but to keep others safe too?

On this anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence we DO still remember and celebrate the huge sacrifices of our forebears to fight the status quo of colonialism, to rail against the English King and Parliament and to decide ultimately to go to war and win our freedom and independence. Sacrifice and bravery are called for now this year too.

Like the brave young woman in our reading from Genesis this morning, Rebecca, who seized the opportunity put in front of her and packed up her belongings and went to a strange new land to marry a man she had never met. We are called to look at the opportunities we are being given every day and chose the brave path, the path of Life. The path that Jesus is calling us to.

When you look back on this year what will you remember having done in the face of our incredible challenges? Will you remember that you wore a mask, stayed at a distance, and ALSO reached out by phone or distanced visits to stay connected? Will you remember that this was the year that you decided to pick up a book and learn more about "How to be an Anti-Racist" or "White Fragility" or something by James Baldwin and became an ally to people who are very much in need allies?

Jesus offers us help in this too. If burdens get too heavy for us to carry alone, Jesus is there. Just a prayer away.

We have to seize this day, and this hour, and this moment. You are listening to this sermon online (on the lawn) because we understand that it is not enough to read the newspaper on a Sunday morning, or to hear the news on the radio, computer or phone. We are Christians. We follow Jesus the Christ. We must do what our Lord did. We must act because we are not alone. We are Christians.

We have been through great struggles and I name just a few in recent history: The Korean and Vietnam wars, the HIV crisis, the Gulf War, the attack on the World Trade Centers and the Pentagon, War in Afghanistan and in Iraq, the SARS and Zicka epidemics and other dangerous diseases. We've been through, and survived, many challenges.

And yet, this is a moment. We can all feel it because we have all been affected by it. We all have had to change our way of living and many of us have suffered physically and financially because of these two tragedies of our life in 2020.

Ultimately the people in the first century will by and large reject Jesus as they rejected John the Baptist. But he reached out in love to his people then anyway. He reached out to us from the cross. And he reaches out to us today.

Invite Jesus to come into your life and your heart today. Our Spiritual Communion is able to strengthen you and me today. Jesus will help us with the burdens we carry today. And he'll give us what we need to get through these times and help others today.