**Authority, Anarchy and Agape**

***By Pastor Rob Benardo***

It was Tuesday of the passion week, the last week of Jesus’ life. Just the day before, Jesus had Road triumphantly into Jerusalem and been hailed as a king. Accepting at least for a time the role as king, Jesus then went into the temple and proceeded to chase out the priests and dignitaries. It is found in the end of chapter 19 of the book of Luke. There it says that Jesus entered the temple and began to drive out those who were selling, saying to them, “it is written my house shall be a house of prayer, but you have made it a den of thieves.” The temple services had become a sham. The proud and pretentious priests were more butchers than anything else. Tens of thousands of animals we’re slaughtered on Passover weekend and the service had lost its meaning. The priests and dignitaries were charging ridiculous rates for the offering animals, knowing that the people must have them. No wonder Jesus referred to it as a den of thieves.

So, with Jesus having cleared the unholy traffic out, many from outside that desired to see Jesus (many of them to receive healing), were coming in. It truly was a little bit of heaven on earth. But of course, the Priests were incensed and wanted him dead. And so, in an effort to have more evidence against him, they asked, “Who gave you the authority to do these things?” Authority. It’s something that none of us really want. I mean who wants someone telling you what to do? But to learn to submit to God’s authority is something all of us need. You see, inside of each of us is a fiercely independent spirit that wants its own way no matter what. God will (after a struggle) give us our own way, but it will be to our eternal ruin. To learn to say “no” to self and “yes” to God’s will is the lesson of all lessons to learn.

Jesus did not answer their question directly but did so by the use of a parable. He told the story of a vineyard owner that leased out his property with the agreement that at harvest time, the leasee would pay his rent with the fruit from the vines. So, harvest time comes, and the owner sends forth one servant after another, three in all, and each of them are treated horribly- mocked, beaten and violently thrown off the property. Most land owners would waste no time in calling in the authorities and having the free-loading farmers ousted, but not this one. This land owner (who represents Father God) exercised something called “macrothymia” in the Greek which means to forgive someone when you have every right (and even the cultural obligation) to punish them to the utmost limit. He would amazingly send His Son into this proven hostile environment to give the rebels one more chance. To those of us that question and even despise his authority and want to “do it my way” and “want to take no man’s say so”, God sends His Son to save us from ourselves. Unfortunately, in the parable, even this act of pure agape love was met with further anarchy and eventual justice was dealt.

And so, in our context today, there are those that are questioning and rebelling against the authority of the world church(which is really God’s authority). Now this is not some decision made by one man or a few men without the input of representatives from all the world, but the prayed through and studied decision confirmed through the years. In fact, you could say that “three servants” have been sent and yet it appears that some are more antagonistic than ever. I would like to summarize with four lessons before I close.

First, when you look the rebels right in the face you will see that “they are you”! You may not be rebelling against the church on this issue, but the truth is, that same spark of rebellion is in you (in your very nature) just waiting to be fanned into a full blaze of unholy flames. And so “love your neighbor as yourself for “you are him.” Secondly, be sure that God is sending His Son to convince anyone that is rebelling to have less confidence in themselves and more confidence in Him as the Leader of His movement AND more confidence in His “delegated messengers”. Thirdly, note that God will not allow any to be pulled into anarchy without their understanding the issue. God would sooner empty every angel out of heaven than to have anyone deceived. Lastly, the parable concludes with only one option. The Rock (Christ and His gospel) must fall on us and break our stubborn will and humble us. That will either happen before He comes to mold us into His beautiful likeness or that Rock will “grind us to powder” after He comes. Blessed be the Lord. Sin will see its end and the rule of Christ will not be denied. Will you give God permission to do that work today?

**GOD’S LIGHT***…by Lorrie Rietman*

One of my favorite things to do in the winter is to plant bulbs that grow indoors: amaryllis bulbs in a pot or hyacinth bulbs you put on top of a vase. While the outdoors is cold, frozen and snowy, we can watch the bulbs send out their roots and slowly break forth and grow. While the flower bulbs outside in the frozen ground are debilitated in the cold and dark, not far away inside the warmth of the house others are growing and thriving.

It is the same for people. This world is dark and cold with evil. While many are living, how many people are truly growing and thriving? Jesus says, “I am the way, the truth and the life....” (John 14:6). True living only comes from Jesus Christ. Is your environment conducive to real growth? Is your environment filled with the warmth and light of God and His word? Or is your home filled more with the world and its ways? “I have set before you, life and death...therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live.” Deuteronomy 30:19.

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**PATHFINDER CLUB REPORT**

*By**Brad and Tracey Hall, Directors of the Battle Creek Pioneers Pathfinder Club*

In January, the pathfinders started out the new year with service by volunteering at our local food bank.  Together, with the help of some of our family members, we sorted through 12,000 pounds of potatoes. We removed spoiled potatoes and then bagged up the good ones to be distributed to local families in need.

Also in January, the teen pathfinders were blessed to attend a spiritual weekend at Camp Au Sable. Our speaker for the weekend was Pastor Hubbard. He charged the pathfinders to be bold for the Lord and to be aware of the spiritual battle for their soul.  He also encouraged us to keep our confidence in the Lord alone. Little things have a way of making a big impact over time. You could say this about a project Rudy Hall took on around 10 years ago. He collected scrap metal and took it to the scrap yard to help raise money for worthy projects, such as Home and School, Pathfinders.

**SCRAP METAL:** Anyone can take their scrap metal to Battle Creek Academy and put it on the trailer by the dumpster and Rudy will separate it and take it to the scrap yard when the prices are at their highest.

The first year, they made $6,000 and thousands thereafter. Please take your unwanted metal to the trailer at the school and let it turn into money for projects for the Lord. “Nobody made a greater mistake than he who did nothing because he could only do a little.” *By Edmund Burke.*

**UPCOMING EVENTS & ANNOUNCEMENTS**

**CONCERT SERIES:** Our next concert will be on **February 23** at **7:00 p.m.** with Rudy Micelli. Rudy Micelli exemplifies the true spirit of Christian music; his sole purpose is to bring others to Christ. He speaks and sings in English, Spanish and Portuguese. Rudy has recorded nine CDs and ministered in nearly 40 countries. In 2017 Rudy Micelli Music Ministry celebrates its 17-year anniversary. "Knowing that my voice makes a positive difference for eternity is my sole motivation to keep going," he says. "I want to be known as a servant of God and nothing else."

**Valentine Date Night**  open to Singles, Couples & Good Friends! **Sunday,** **February 17**: Social Time @ 4:30, Dinner @ 5:00. Advanced Reservation required. Forms are available on the credenza in the Sanctuary foyer and in the Annex foyer after SonSets tonight. If you have questions, please call Ralph Benedict or Clara Engle.

**LADIES TEA:** **February 4** at **1:00 p.m.** in the Dining Room.  We will make and prepare Valentine cards for homebound members (bring cards and stamps). **February 18,** we will meet at the New China Moon Restaurant located at 590 W. Columbia Avenue for lunch. Please contact Pam Metcalf for more information.

**BIBLE STUDY:** **Exploring the Everlasting Gospel** - **Tuesdays** at **7:00 p.m.** in the Seminar Room. We will continue our study of the most precious message the Lord sent to His people. It is a very powerful message designed by Him for His people giving the assurance of salvation and the necessary power to prepare them for the time of trouble, which is brewing in the world today. *From Jerry Finneman*

**BIBLE MARKING: Fridays** from **7:00** to **8:00 p.m.** (Junior Classroom); come and have fun transforming your Bible into a witnessing tool, which also makes it easier to study your Bible with others.