

Un-budged In Their Tracks

Introduction

Check-in & Introductions

Watch

Follow this link and watch "The Zax" by Dr. Seuss.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dZmZzGxGpSs>

Gospel Lesson

Matthew 23:1-12 (NSRV)

Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples, ²"The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat; ³therefore, do whatever they teach you and follow it; but do not do as they do, for they do not practice what they teach. ⁴They tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on the shoulders of others; but they themselves are unwilling to lift a finger to move them. ⁵They do all their deeds to be seen by others; for they make their phylacteries broad and their fringes long. ⁶They love to have the place of honor at banquets and the best seats in the synagogues, ⁷and to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces, and to have people call them rabbi. ⁸But you are not to be called rabbi, for you have one teacher, and you are all students. ⁹And call no one your father on earth, for you have one Father—the one in heaven. ¹⁰Nor are you to be called instructors, for you have one instructor, the Messiah. ¹¹The greatest among you will be your servant. ¹²All who exalt themselves will be humbled, and all who humble themselves will be exalted.

Sermon Focus

The lesson of the Zax is short and to the point. We all know what it's like to not want to budge in our ideals. We all know what it's like to be in the midst of conflict. We also know what it's like to be people who are willing to change, watching two parties who are not willing to budge. It's a frustrating situation no matter which view you are holding at any given time. There is a visceral tension in the entire situation.

The situation the Zax find themselves in is familiar to all people, communities, and institutions—including the church. As Pastor Andy mentioned, the result of the *church* not budging is that, "The world keeps going, and the church becomes less and less relevant in the world." New ideas can be scary, and sometimes we may be asked to move from our comfort zones. Sometimes the change can even feel threatening. But this brings us to another important question: Are we really being threatened? Are either of these sides doing harm? The Zax in the story do not actually pose a threat to each other or the world. In fact, the world moves along as they remain unmoved.

Discerning when the threat is real and when it is not is crucial in how we deal with conflict.

The Gospel of Matthew was written for the Jewish community, which lived under the very real and terrifying presence of Rome. In the midst of the threat of persecution and even death, the Jewish people would look to their own religious leadership. Jesus' critique of these leaders is the main theme in our Gospel lesson for today. An already struggling people, under a real threat, are met with leadership more concerned about maintaining their laws than they are having a heart for the people.

And like Jesus, we today have to wonder who we are leaving out, who we are leaving behind if we do not move with the pace of the Holy Spirit, that moves with the pace of the world? And, we have to ask "Am I putting my ideology above my community?"

Discussion Questions

- 1) When have you been "Un-budged in your tracks?"
- 2) When have you seen the church stuck in its ways?
- 3) How do you discern if a conflict is harmful, or if it just has two sides?
- 4) Share your thoughts on this quote from Dr. Warren Carter: "I read Matthew's gospel as a counternarrative. It is a work of resistance, written for a largely Jewish religious group. It 'stands and/or speaks against' the status quo dominated by Roman imperial power and synagogal control. It resists these cultural structures."
- 5) Where have you witnessed people putting ideology, above community?"

Prayer

Holy God, we acknowledge that conflict happens and can happen in healthy ways. We ask that you help us to move with the Spirit, to respect and love our neighbors more and more each day. We pray for a large dose of humbleness and compassion, especially in relationships that strain us. In the name of your Son and by the power of your Spirit, we pray, Amen.

"Well, of course, the world didn't stand still. The world grew. In a couple of years, the new highway came through, and they built it right over those two stubborn Zax, and left them there, standing un-budged in their tracks."