

The Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost (2017)

Matthew 21:23–27 *When [Jesus] entered the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came up to him as he was teaching, and said, "By what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?"*

Jesus answered them, "I also will ask you one question, and if you tell me the answer, then I also will tell you by what authority I do these things. The baptism of John, from where did it come? From heaven or from man?" And they discussed it among themselves, saying, "If we say, 'From heaven,' he will say to us, 'Why then did you not believe him?' But if we say, 'From man,' we are afraid of the crowd, for they all hold that John was a prophet." So they answered Jesus, "We do not know." And he said to them, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things.

In the Name of Jesus.

Have no fear, little flock; have no fear, little flock;
For the Father has chosen to give you the Kingdom!
Have you fear, little flock!

Be glad and rejoice with the apostle, with the Father above,
with the heavenly angels and with your fellow baptized!

The ONE GROUP the Lord encourages: the baptized!
When He sent out the Eleven to make more of what THEY were
out of what WE are—notice, He has them numbered, one-by-one,
to Eleven. Judas thought too little of his OLD group—Peter,
James and John and Jesus—and hired on with another group, the
one with the cash. So that left Twelve minus one; counting the
Father can do, as He does with each hair on your head and mine.
(Easier on my part, of course!)

Genesis Two and verse Seven: ‘—then the LORD God

formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature.’

That ‘living creature’ is the ‘soul’ of the Ezekiel lesson today: ‘All souls are MINE; the soul of the father as well as the soul of the son is mine.’ ‘Nephesh’ is the Hebrew word, you were dying to know. Hard word to put across to our language, as the varied translation I just told you prove. Nephesh! It is ‘living creature’ or is it ‘soul?’

What Nephesh AIN’T I can tell you! You, as a Nephesh—breath of the LORD, the Living God of Abraham coagulating dust—you are NOT what the pagans said: part icky body stuff, part immortal shiny part that needs to escape somehow.

And YOU, NEPESH, are NOT defined by ANY GROUP—unless it’s like all those individuals who went to be baptized by John, and among whom—Himself, Nephesh—Jesus joined in, over the objections of John.

John objected to Jesus joining that choir; AND the Pharisees! Why did THEY want to be baptized by John?! Well, they saw a crowd! And like ALL good pastors and priests and religious types, a CROWD is something to get in front of and focus on YOU!

But Jesus was baptized, for He told John that God’s righteousness is only complete when the Holy One of Israel dwells with those who can only confess what they are, who they are, their Nephesh. And the Pharisees were not baptized; for...the...exact...same...reason! For what sort of GROUP is THAT to join in with?!

So the Lord spoke to Ezekiel and told him, Israel, us, that each and every Nephesh is HIS: His breath, His special creation, His individual wonder! You, me, e...v...e...r...y ONE!

And then He capped it off: ‘The Nephesh who sins shall die!’

Rewind; play again!

Each Nephesh is mine; the Nephesh who sins shall die!

My dear ones, the Lord was not being immature when He refused to answer the Pharisees: ‘Well if you won’t answer ME, then I won’t answer YOU!’

No, the ONLY THING our Savior could have received from engaging that GROUP any longer, was to secure time and space for His Nephesh HERE—THIS PLACE—THIS GROUPTHINK WE HAVE GOING ON AND INSIST ON!

It was time for Him to leave all this; and He was in just the right place: the temple, the Holy City; perfect scene from which to cast out His Nephesh, all that He is.

Notice that, even on the cross, one criminal on one side ganged up with the other criminal on the other side to rail against Jesus. Even in their extremity, the go-to comfort for those doomed

men was a group. Two against one! Showed HIM!

Your Baptism into Christ, dear Christian, is the most glorious, singular, individual New-creation Nephesh!

What did the Lord demand of old Israel?

‘Make for yourselves a new heart and a new spirit! Why will you die, O house of Israel?!’

And THERE’S the money that is religion. The false promise, to the moneyed among us, that you and I can INDEED make for ourselves a new heart and gain for ourselves a new spirit! And how to do that?

Follow...the...group!

For us, now Eleven plus, it is each Nephesh stunningly sinful and worthy of nothing from heaven but death; but, instead, granted life from One Man, One Soul, One Living Creature, One Son of Adam, One Son of Man, One Nephesh. Who, when He died, pushed out other souls from their tombs. And, when He rose, He made the crowd of His death-guard become like dead men.

But that little group ran to another group, who paid them to tell our WHOLE GROUP that it’s all a delusion and trick and so on.

And yet, today, Nephesh, Nephesh, Nepheshoth—that's the plural!—here each one of us receives the Body of One Man, the Blood of One Nephesh, to take us each, individually, to the Father in peace.

No matter what this wicked world says together;

No matter what this world's religion says together;

Your Old Adam, mine, each Nephesh, is the Lord's! And He pledges that all that is OLD about us has been passed over; and everything about us is now made NEW!

In other words:

Have good cheer, little flock; have good cheer, little flock;
For the Father will keep you in His love forever!
Have good cheer, little flock!

In the Name of Jesus. Amen.