

## The Music of God's Heart July 5, 2020

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*Texts: Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30*

What a strange image Jesus offers us in this passage. Did the children of first-century Judea really sit in marketplaces playing feast and funeral tunes to each other? Maybe—I mean, who knows what people did before TikTok? But then who are these other children who are so out of step that they refuse to play the game? What's this about?

Jesus is talking about John the Baptist and himself.

John was first on the scene, you'll remember, casting aside the trappings of civilization and going out into the Judean desert. The gospels describe him as a voice crying in the wilderness. Clad in an old camel hide, his only food what the desert could provide, John called out the sins of his people and their leaders, summoning them to a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. Now he's languishing in a palace dungeon. In Jesus' comparison, John is the child who refuses to dance to society's tune.

Then, close on John's heels came Jesus, playing a music all his own: sweeping aside barriers of separation and exclusion; reaching out to the hurting and the outcast; partying with notorious sinners; laying healing hands on people you weren't supposed to touch. If John was seen as fanatically severe, Jesus must have appeared completely libertine—a person who thought the rules didn't apply to him. Jesus is the child who refuses to fast and look stern to satisfy religious expectations.

John came to clean house, and people grumbled: The house was fine the way it was! Now Jesus is throwing the doors of that house open, inviting unacceptable people in to share in God's joy. He's welcoming, he's forgiving, he's reconciling, he's extending mercy, whether people deserve it or not. And traditionalists are arguing about whose house it is and who controls the guest list. Even John is thrown for a loop. He sends his disciples to ask Jesus point blank: Are you the one we've been waiting for or not?? Clearly the *Everyone-come-on-in!* approach is not what John was expecting.

Jewish people had been waiting a long time for the Messiah to come and set the world right. At the very least they expected that the Romans would be driven out, the people set free, and the wicked punished. They did not anticipate that the wicked would be invited to stay for dinner.

And much as I'd like to think of myself as "on the right side of this debate," I can see myself in those people who dream of a day of reckoning, when the powerful will finally be called to account. And I know I'm just as prone to judge and point fingers as any of the folks Jesus had to contend with.

*Look at that woman out walking her dog without a mask. How can people be so selfish? That jogger is coming right toward me, no mask! Thanks, buddy.*

Or how about the guy who threw a party for 100 people while already showing symptoms of the virus? When the Messiah comes, that guy is going to get an earful.

There's just something in human nature that makes it hard to resist watching each other and passing judgment. I think it's because we're trying so hard to be good and worthy and acceptable. As if, deep down, we are terrified, terrified that we might not be. And so, the lines of division widen and widen—all of us indignant, all of us convinced God feels the same way we do.

And over and over we have to be reminded that God is actually more interested in bringing healing and reconciliation than in vindicating us and setting our enemies straight.

You don't need to keep dancing to that fault-finding tune, Jesus says. No matter how catchy. No matter how much it tries to get in your head and stay there on permanent repeat.

Jesus' own ear is tuned to the music of God's heart, the music of reconciling love. He has indeed come to put things right. But his aim is to bring us closer, not cut off the guilty. Walking with us in humility and compassion, in mercy and forgiveness, he becomes a way of healing and a door into God's presence.

So come, all you people, and sing a new song to God:

Sing to God, all the earth!

Come to Christ's table and join in his eating and his drinking, his feasting and rejoicing!

Beloved, this will be our first prerecorded communion ever, in our church's history. Think of it as God making a way out of no way—God determined to get to you and draw you close to God's heart, to share the divine life of love and connection and joy which is for you and for all of us—friends, strangers, enemies, all forgiven, all welcome.

And now—yes! Let's sing.