

## Reflection for 27<sup>th</sup> September (Trinity 17) Matthew 21:23-32

When Jesus entered the Temple, he was challenged about his authority by those who relied on their positions in the priestly hierarchy for their own authority. Jesus wouldn't answer their question directly. Rather, he posed questions to them, asking them to think about the story he told.

Whoever we look to for leadership, we often want them to have clear answers in what is an increasingly complex world. And some would-be leaders will try to supply such answers, although they often come in the form of simplistic slogans rather than real solutions. Those who recognise the complexities and are frustrated by simplistic answers, might be tempted to get T-shirts or baseball caps printed with the phrase 'It's complicated...'. But perhaps that is falling into the same trap of turning things into slogans.

What Jesus encourages his listeners to do with his parables is to think – to use the brain cells in our heads as more than packing material. Before today's parable he explicitly asks those challenging his authority 'What do you think?'

Cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) is a tool used to help people with a range of psychological problems. Instead of delving into either a person's history of their relationships (as with Freudian and other psychotherapies), or addressing biochemical imbalances in their brain (as with psychiatry), CBT attempts to change a person's thought patterns in response to certain situations, encouraging them even to change the language that they use to describe their circumstances, with the understanding that a change in thinking patterns can lead to a change in response. It isn't the solution to every psychological condition (again, the human mind and the world in which we operate are too complicated for a single simple solution) but it has made a massive difference to many people's lives.

The Greek word for repentance, *metanoia*, literally means 'change of heart', but what is implied is an entire change of attitude and direction – a change in behaviour that begins when we change our minds. Perhaps we need a form of spiritual cognitive behavioural therapy.