

## There Was a Man Who Had Two Sons

Matthew 21:28-32

Pentecost 19

There was a man who had two sons. These two sons represented two specific groups of people at a specific time. But they also represent two more general groups of people from throughout all time.

There was a man who had two sons.

He went to the first and said, 'Son, go and work today in the vineyard.' "I will not," he answered. He didn't want to go work because he wanted to hang out with his friends. Because he wanted to hang out with his girlfriend. Because he wanted to go to a party. "I will not," he answered because he was tired, lazy, because he had a hangover. "I will not," he answered because he wanted to focus on other things. Because he thought he could earn more money doing something else. Because he didn't like the idea of working in the vineyard. Because he disagreed with the way that work was done in the vineyard. Because he didn't like the other people who were working in the vineyard. Because he thought working in the vineyard was beneath him.

"I will not," he answered, but later he changed his mind and went. The idea here of "changed his mind" is connected to repentance. And, the word repentance actually is related to the concept of turning around, to go a different direction. To change directions. This son changed his mind and he changed the direction he was going and he went to work in the vineyard.

The other son answered, 'I will, sir.' He agreed! He said he would do it. He expressed his dedication. He wanted to be a good son. He wanted credit and recognition for complying with the father's command. "I will, sir." He talked the talk. He got ready.

He answered, 'I will, sir,' but he did not go. He didn't follow through with it. He never actually showed up. He didn't go and work in the vineyard.

"Which of the two did what his father wanted?"

The people listening to Jesus tell this story answered, "The first."

These two sons represented two specific groups of people at a specific time, in Jesus' day.

The first son represented people like the tax collectors and prostitutes. The profession of "tax collector" was pretty much synonymous with "thief." The first son represented people who, at first, had very little to do with God, Christ, morals, faith... He may even represent the Gentiles, the people who, initially, were not the first people to whom Jesus went. But this Son represented people, tax collectors, prostitutes, Gentiles, unbelievers who eventually repented. Possibly at the preaching and invitation of John the Baptist. This son includes people like Mary Magdalene, who was a prostitute but became such a dedicated follower of Jesus she was one of the first to be there when Jesus rose from the dead. People like Zacchaeus who was a tax collector that cheated countless people, but became a follower of Jesus and, from his heart, paid back the people he cheated and shared the good news with his friends.

The second son represented the teachers of the law, the Pharisees, the scribes, the religious leaders, many of the Jewish people. People who, from the very beginning, seemed dedicated and committed. People who seemed to comply with what God was asking. People who appeared pious, who appeared religious.

They seemed committed to the church. But these people rejected John the Baptist. They didn't believe that his baptism was a serious thing that they needed. They weren't repentant. They didn't believe in Jesus.

These two sons represented two specific groups of people in Jesus' day. They also represent general groups of people throughout all time.

Today, there are people like the first son. People like you and me who were born as sinners but by God's grace were brought to faith. People who maybe have very undesirable things past, maybe at one time rejected God, people who were totally opposed to the Christian faith... but, by God's grace, repented, believed, and entered the kingdom of God.

Today, there are people like the second son. People who may have been given every opportunity and seem to be genuine about their faith. But, on the inside, they are not repentant and trusting in Jesus as their Savior.

It can be easy for us to look at these two sons and see examples of them around us. We may even think of ourselves as being like the first son. We were born in sin, at one time we were lost in sin, whether before being baptized or before having faith worked in us through the Word, but now we are in the kingdom of God. But the truth is, sometimes we can be like both sons. Sometimes God tells us what to do, he is very clear in his Word, and it takes us a while to comply. Sometimes we are quick to make promises or dedicate ourselves to some sort of work in the kingdom, but we fail to follow through.

In this parable there is a warning. It's obvious. Don't be like the second son. Avoid the serious danger and the offense of honoring God with our lips, but not our hearts. But, in this parable there is also a promise. When we think about the first son and Jesus' comments, we are reminded that anyone can enter the kingdom of heaven. Even people who initially say no, who initially reject, who completely misplace their priorities – before the final judgment there is always the opportunity for repentance and forgiveness.

Anyone, tax collectors, prostitutes, the worst of the worst, the chief of sinners... and you and me... are allowed to enter the kingdom of heaven. And, anyone, we, can enter because of a third Son.

There was a man who had three sons. The first one wasn't perfect. The second one wasn't perfect. But the third Son, who was actually the one and only Son, the Son eternally begotten of the Father, he was perfect. He's not mentioned in this parable, but he the one speaking it.

Jesus never disobeyed his father. When God the Father told him, go and work in my vineyard, go down to earth and redeem mankind with your own life, your own death, and your own rising from the dead, Jesus went. Jesus agreed and he followed it through. Both his words and actions were always pure, faithful, honest, and obedient. Both his words and actions speak loudly to us, telling us about God's love and salvation.

May we through the presence of the third Son in our hearts be equipped to also be a third son. One who answers the Father's invitation to work in the vineyard saying, "I will sir." And one, who immediately goes to work. Amen.