

Nineteenth Sunday After Pentecost

October 23, 2011

Amazing Grace Lutheran Church – Pastor Chip Wilke

Matthew 21:28-32

"What do you think? 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, but later he changed his mind and went. "Then the father went to the other son and said the same thing. He answered, 'I will, sir,' but he did not go. "Which of the two did what his father wanted?" "The first," they answered. Jesus said to them, "I tell you the truth, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you. For John came to you to show you the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes did. And even after you saw this, you did not repent and believe him. "What do you think? 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, but later he changed his mind and went. "Then the father went to the other son and said the same thing. He answered, 'I will, sir,' but he did not go. "Which of the two did what his father wanted?" "The first," they answered. Jesus said to them, "I tell you the truth, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you. For John came to you to show you the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes did. And even after you saw this, you did not repent and believe him. (NIV)

I want to share with you a quick childhood story that my brothers and I still talk about and won't soon forget. The four of us one night were in our basement where we had a small slate pool table. We were in the middle of a game when our father came half way down the steps and yelled to my youngest brother: "*Seth, go outside and take out the trash.*" After all, that was one of Seth's chores for the week. But then out of Seth's mouth came the surprising, jaw-dropping, word none of us expected to hear. Seth replied back, "*NO!*" Seth, to this day still says this isn't what he meant or wanted to say but he said it and the rest of us as his brothers knew we were now in for a treat. You almost had to be there to appreciate this but the next thing we all remember is my brother running around the pool table as fast as he could with my dad right behind him. When my dad got close enough I remember his foot going up and my brother Seth receiving a good kick in the pants. All the while Seth was running he was yelling: "*I meant yes...yes...yes...yes.*" I guess you could say Seth changed his mind.

This begs the question: do we have the right to tell our dads "no"? From this story I believe you know the answer to that question in my house growing up. But how unwise is it to ignore, to flat out disobey, the words of our father? How much more is this true when it comes to our Father in heaven? Do we think we have the right to tell the God who created us "no"? How unwise to ignore and not do what our Father in heaven commands? This morning, as once again we are taught a lesson from Jesus in a parable, I pray we learn to: **Recognize the importance of doing the will of the Father.**

Our text takes us to Tuesday of Holy Week. Jesus had just visited the temple overturning the tables of the moneychangers who were turning the Lord's "*house of prayer*" into a "*den of robbers.*" This was certain to have caused a stir among the leaders of the church. The Passover was their busiest and most profitable time and now Jesus comes along and chases all these people out of the temple area. On top of all this they are

still angry that the children of Israel praised Him shouting, "**Hosanna to the Son of David.**"

Now Jesus returns to the temple area and the chief priests and elders come and ask: "**By what authority are you doing these things?**" "**And who gave you this authority?**" If Jesus answered by the authority of God they would accuse Him of blaspheme, but if Jesus said by His own power He would be degraded in the eyes of the people. They are looking to trap Jesus and Jesus knows it. So turning the tables on them Jesus says: "If you answer my question I will tell you by what authority I am doing these things." Jesus asks: "**John's baptism – where did it come from? Was it from heaven, or from men?**"

The chief priests and elders knew that John the Baptist spoke the same message as Jesus. They knew they had also questioned John about his authority. These Jewish leaders discuss this saying if we answer "**from heaven. He will say then why didn't you believe him? But if we say, From men – we are afraid of the people, for they all hold that John was a prophet.**" So they tell Jesus, "**We don't know.**" And Jesus replies, "**Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things.**" But Jesus is not done with these elders and high priests yet. He is not ready to give up on them and so He teaches them a lesson.

He says: "**What do you think? 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, but later he changed his mind and went. Then the father went to the other son and said the same thing. He answered, I will sir, but he did not go.**" The father has a vineyard that needs to be taken care of so he asks his sons. Really, this request is an invitation for both of them. The Greek word used here is the one for child and is a term of affection. The father tenderly invites his sons to work in his vineyard that day. While both sons are addressed in the same loving way, their answers are polar opposites. The first son gives a flat out "No!" He will not go and work. But later he changes his mind – the very same Greek word Jesus uses later on that has the meaning of repent. And this son now does the will of his father and goes to work in the vineyard. The second son responds by saying I will with the emphasis on I. He addresses the father as sir, master, or lord, a sign of respect. He outwardly respects the father's word and says he is willing to carry it out. "**I will, yes sir, I will.**" Only, he doesn't. He never goes to the vineyard to work.

Telling this parable, Jesus now asks them a pointed question. "**Which of the two did what his father wanted?**" Jesus' question had only one answer, and the religious leaders gave it and indicted themselves. Yes, even the vilest sinner that repents gives an obedience far more true than the upright man wallowing in his self-righteousness. Imagine this scene of these self-righteous smug teachers. They seemed so righteous as they stood in the temple courts. The great men of Israel had gathered against Jesus. These men knew all the words to say and ways to act, but the only "righteousness" they had was a self-righteousness that offended God. They claimed to be doing God's work and fulfilling his will, but there was no repentance and no true obedience. So now Jesus now applies this parable to them with a shocking message: "**I tell you the truth, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you. For John came to show you the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes did.**" Talk about a good kick in the pants, Jesus gives one to them here. Why? For Jesus also wants them to repent. Jesus wants them to turn to Him and live. He wants them to listen to John's message to

repent and be baptized, the message that pointed to Jesus as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

Jesus wants the same from us. What son do we see in ourselves? Unfortunately, too often I see both of these sons in me. No, maybe we haven't lived such an openly sinful lifestyle as a prostitute or tax collector, but haven't we told God "no" at times? Have we ever flat out disobeyed our Father in heaven? Isn't that how each of us were by nature, hostile to God and dead in sin? Yet, there are also times we look like that second son. The son who says "yes sir", and then chases the pleasures of this life. The son who says "yes sir", and then puts his own interests ahead of the Lord's work. How many young or even adult confirmands have stood in church and said "yes Lord" I will faithfully hear your Word and partake of your Sacrament. I will give of my time, talents, and treasures. I will be faithful with the help of God to the point of death. But many that say "yes, I will, yes sir" are soon no longer faithful to such promises. Then there are times the holier than thou Pharisee inside each of us that looks down on others, that wants to be content with saying the right words when it comes to faith, needs this stinging rebuke from Christ. We have been the son who shamefully told God no, and have been the son who says the right things but does not do them!

Because of such sins, we deserve much more than a swift kick in the pants. We deserve hell. Yet, as the Lord called sinners like the prostitute Rahab, or the tax collectors Matthew and Zacheaus back to Him, so the Lord has called us. Our Father has called us to repentance and faith. He has called us to faith in His only Son who always said yes and who always did what He told the Father He would. He was perfectly obedient – even to death on the cross. For Jesus knew the Father's good will was that He die and on the third day be raised again. Jesus knew that His suffering and death was the payment that was needed for our sin and for our salvation.

Because Jesus faithfully did that work, the Father now tenderly calls us. Through Holy baptism and through the Gospel's powerful call He changes our minds. He works repentance in our hearts. Now, by God's grace, we have become children who live in a family where we don't even think of telling our Father "no." We live in God's family where it is a joy to do His work and serve our Father who gives us every good and perfect gift. I pray the Holy Spirit continue to guide us to be a third son who tells our Father "yes" and then goes out and does His will. How important is it to do the will of the Father, to do the works God requires? Jesus once answered: ***"The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent" (John 6).*** I pray such true faith produces true obedience. After all, because of Jesus we have the best Father in the world. Amen.