

Provoked by the Parables at Brentwood Presbyterian

The Two Sons

Oct 2, 2011

**Psalm 19 and Matthew 21:28-32
(Hymns – 65, 644, 534, 620)**

It's an interesting scenario that Jesus sets out in this story.

Two sons are asked to go and work in the vineyard that day.

I hear the tone of those words from the father
as invitation rather than command.

“Here's an opportunity to contribute to the health of the vineyard,”
rather than “You must go and work.”

The focus is on what the son can offer to the family business
rather than on what the son has to do.

This is an invitation to participate in a greater good
rather than a command to go to work.

The first son refuses, but later changes his mind and goes.

There is something about this invitation
that sticks in the mind,

plays around with our hearts and our intuition,
works its magic of attraction and changes our initial response.

There is something about this invitation
that slowly reshapes the way we see things
and what we do about things.

There is something about this invitation
that helps us recognize that working for the family business
in the vineyard is the best thing we can do for ourselves and others.

We should note that Jesus often uses the vineyard
as a metaphor for the kingdom of heaven.

And Psalm 19 that we read with Lynn this morning
reminds us of the qualities of life that are nourished in that vineyard
as we work for the kingdom.

We receive wisdom, happiness, understanding, fairness,
sweetness, knowledge, forgiveness, safety, and freedom
when we accept this invitation to work for the kingdom.

All of this flows from the law of the Lord.

As Jesus will say shortly in the midst of his disputes
with the Jewish leaders of his day,
“Love the Lord your God with all your heart,
with all your soul, and with all your mind.’
This is the greatest and the most important commandment.
And the second most important commandment is like it;
‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’
The whole Law of Moses and the teachings of the prophets
depend on these two commandments.”

If we love in this way – God, others, and self –
then we will experience fully the salvation God offers
through wisdom, happiness, understanding, fairness,
sweetness, knowledge, forgiveness, safety, and freedom.

The spirit in which we embrace these qualities of life,
these gifts of grace,
is not so much in obedience to an authority
as it is in gratitude to a fatherly friend.

The Law of God, Jesus is saying
to the self-righteous authoritarians
who held religious power in his day,
is not about conforming to what you think is right
and what will keep you in your positions of privilege,
but about enjoying the gifts of God in ways that free people to flourish.
In that flourishing, in human beings fully alive,
we find ways of glorifying God that bring him great delight.
There is nothing that God enjoys more than
his beloved creatures revelling in his grace.

So, that’s what we get from working in the vineyard –
wisdom, happiness, understanding, fairness,
sweetness, knowledge, forgiveness, safety, and freedom.
Not a bad place to spend your energy and time.

The second son likes the sound of that invitation.
He accepts the invitation readily when asked.
Then he changes his mind and does not go.
Something got in the way.
Something that appeared more attractive came up
and he decided to skip the vineyard that day.
Or perhaps he was afraid of the demands of the work.
We can only imagine his motivation for accepting, then rejecting.

But we do know what he missed –
wisdom, happiness, understanding, fairness,
sweetness, knowledge, forgiveness, safety, and freedom.

Those qualities, in their fullness, come when,
and only when,
we have accepted and followed through on the invitation of God
to work for the kingdom.
They come in and through the actual work itself.
They enable us to do the work and
they are created in even greater abundance as we do the work,
not only for us, but also for others who enjoy the fruits of the vineyard.

Now, Jesus made more of this story in his ongoing disputes
with the self-righteous religious leaders of his day.
There are many more sermons that could have been preached,
and perhaps will be,
on this passage.

But this morning,
as we gather at the table of the kingdom,
I wanted to draw our attention to the rich feast of gifts we enjoy
when we accept the invitation and actually follow through on it
to work for the kingdom in intimacy with Jesus Christ.
Sometimes we are hesitant to accept, then do.
Sometimes we accept with enthusiasm, then don't.

True maturity in the faith involves developing the habit
of both accepting and doing.

Let's enjoy the benefits of that maturity together
at the Lord's Table.

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