

Pastor Jon's Sermon from Sunday October 1, 2023 based on Matthew 21:23-32 the Parable of the Two Sons

"I Should Not Have Done That"

Our lessons today are about repentance... literally to change one's mind... or to turn around.

Martin Luther wrote in the first of his 95 Theses that he posted on the doors of the Wittenberg Castle church "When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, 'Repent,' He willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance." To Luther, repentance was meant to be a daily occurrence.

In Philippians Paul wanted the community of believers in Philippi to get along amidst their differences. He wants them to change their minds to be the same mind that was in Christ Jesus... who didn't regard equality with God as something to be exploited... but humbled himself even to the point of death... death on a cross. For Paul, this means having the mind of Christ means to do nothing from selfish ambition, regarding others as better than yourselves, and looking not to your own interests, but the interests of others.

Our Gospel included a parable of a father who had two sons that he asked to go to work in his vineyard. The first son, for whatever reason said "I will not"... maybe he was tired... or angry at his dad... we don't know for sure. But he changed his mind and went. The second son told his father that he would go... but didn't. Which one did the will of his father? The first. Jesus is saying that our willingness to admit when we are wrong and following through with action are kingdom values.

Isn't that true for us Christians? Knowing God and speaking about our faith is one thing, but unless it is accompanied by actions... that are grounded in the love of Jesus... they merely words. Our faith is meant to be active in love.

In her book *Amazing Grace*, North Dakota writer and poet, Kathleen Norris, told the story of a little boy who wrote a poem in a writing workshop called "The Monster Who Was Sorry." He began by admitting that he hates it when his father yells at him: his response (in

the poem) is to throw his sister down the stairs, and then to wreck his room, and finally to wreck the whole town. The poem concludes, “Then I sit in my messy house and say to myself, ‘I shouldn’t have done all that.’”

He had a broken heart over what he had done. This repentance is the beginning of a changed life for the boy. God can use that and fill you up again.

In our Gospel, Jesus, who just rode into Jerusalem on a donkey with and then went into the temple and flipped over the tables of the money changers, is calling out the religious leader’s exploitative practices in the temple. They want to know by what authority Jesus does these things. They didn’t believe Jesus was God and they weren’t willing to change their minds about him because he was threatening their way of living... their ability to make money.

Then Jesus lifted up public sinners like tax collectors and prostitutes as examples, who heard the preaching of John the Baptist and have changed their hearts and minds and believed in Jesus. He said, “They will enter the kingdom of God before all of you.”

Jesus’ point is again is that it’s not one’s position, knowledge, or authority that allows them to enter the kingdom of God, but one’s willingness to believe in him and live accordingly.

The religiously righteous people wrongly believe that they are better than others. Therefore, they feel they have no need to repent. But the moral outcasts have no such illusions, they know how bad they are.

There is a reversal of expectations in the parable — those who are considered the opposite of “good”, who have failed to live in the right way, but who have repented and believe, will be given entry to the kingdom of heaven first. That’s good news for all of us who fail to live the right way. That is Amazing Grace.

Because we are human sinners, we will mess up daily. Our words and actions do fall short of the glory of God daily. That’s where the grace of the cross enters in. When we repent... or have a broken heart over what we have done or left undone... or when we say, “I shouldn’t have done all that” like the boy we are forgiven. Amen