

“A TALE OF TWO SONS”

Pent 15; Proper 21 A

Sunday & Wednesday, September 25 & 28, 2011

Zion Lutheran Church, Beecher, IL

Sermon Text – Matthew 21:23-32

OT Reading – Ezekiel 18:1-4, 25-32

Epistle Reading – Romans 2:1-4, 14-18

Gospel Reading – Matthew 21:23-32

Dear friends in Christ Jesus,

You heard it... Jesus told a parable within earshot of the Pharisees, one of the groups of religious authorities of Israel.

A certain man had two sons. He went to the first and said, “**Son, go and work in the vineyard today.**” In so many words, the son answered, “**Uhhh... Dad... think again. That’s not happening with me!**” It was sin through and through – outright rebellion against his father!

The father went to the second son and asked him to do the same thing. That son answered, “**I go, sir,**” but... as you heard... he was lying through his teeth with no intention, *whatsoever*, of going. And, of course, he didn’t go.

The two sons at first seemed to be worlds apart. But sinners they *both* were. One sinned in *word*: “**I will not!**” The other sinned in *deed*: “**I will, sir...**” but he did not.

Several years ago, a young man towing horse trailer pulled into my driveway so as to turn around. Let’s just say *that he had no clue* how to back a trailer. He backed out of the driveway, but went too far... going deep into the ditch smacking my mailbox in the process.

I heard the commotion and went out to the street to help. It took a while, but we eventually got his rig out of the ditch.

Before he left, I pointed at my mangled mailbox and asked the young man if he would fix it for me. He extended his hand... looked me straight in the eye... and as we shook hands he said: “**Oh, sure. I’ll be back this afternoon and fix it for you!**”

You know... I waited *four days* for that kid to come back! And... as you’ve no doubt already figured out... he *never did* show up! I had to repair the mailbox myself. I shouldn’t have been, but I was surprised that he didn’t honor his word. He said that he’d fix the mailbox... but he didn’t.

In hindsight, I see that although he might not have had a clue about how to back a trailer... but he was well schooled in knowing what to say in order to dodge responsibility and duty. He personified the second son in Jesus’ parable.

Two sons. The first son sinned in word... the second, in action... or lack of action.

It’s been that way for a long time. “**All the things the Lord has set before us we will do,**” (Ex. 24, 3, ESV) so said the Israelites on Mount Sinai. But, how long was it... until they made a golden calf and were worshipping it?

“**Lord, I will never fall away...**” (Mt. 26, 34, ESV) said Peter. But, as we know, three times he denied the Lord Jesus before the night was even over.

And so it is with you. Sometimes the rebellion comes out in words... other times in deeds. But sin it is... make no mistake about it.

And, it's so very easy for us to spot sin in others... and then point an accusing finger... just like the Pharisees did... and to whom it was that Jesus directed this parable.

“Look at that person! See how much of a sinner he is. Look at the rebellion in her!”

The Pharisees were like the second son. They were hypocrites – acting or pretending the part of being religious and following the way of holiness. They went through the motions of religion... but their hearts were *far* from where they needed to be.

And... all too often... that's where we are as well. We, too, put on an act sometimes fooling other people... but never... ever... fooling God! Oh, we try, don't we? We talk the talk... but we're *far* from walking the walk of being a child of God.

As Jesus addressed the Pharisees in this parable, so He addresses us. Jesus looks us dead in the eye and asks: **“Where is your heart?”**

To be clear... and brutally honest... we all must admit that there's an actor in each of us. Like the two sons in our parable, we *have* sinned against the Lord! We've done both the rebellious **“No”** and the lying-through-our-teeth **“Yes”**... and sinned. Pig-headed... we haven't lived as He would have us live. Our rebellion is there... evident to Him... *and us!*

What does our Lord say to this duplicity... to this futile acting? He has one word: **“Repent...”**; that is, turn away from your foolish and pathetic thoughts of being smarter than Him... or thinking that you can say one thing to Him... do something else... and actually get away with it!

“Cast away from you all the transgressions that you have committed and make yourselves a new heart and a new spirit... Turn and live.” (Ezekiel 18:21, ESV) So says our Lord in the Old Testament lesson.

Back to the parable... **“What do you think...”** Jesus asked. **“Which of the two did the will of his father?”**

“The first,” the Pharisees replied... having in mind the son who first said **“No”** but then turned.

Jesus, then, knowing that the Pharisees would remain secure in their sin and in a state of unrepentance... replied to them: **“Truly, I say to you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes go into the kingdom of God before you. ³²For John came to you in the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes believed him. And even when you saw it, you did not afterward change your minds and believe him.”** (Mt. 21:32, ESV)

Turning. That's what it's all about. Repentance means turning. But it's *not* our turning to God. Rather... it's about God turning *us* toward *Him*... and we not reject Him.

Once you were a sinner... trapped in your own web of lies and deceit. But *now*... be turned *by* God... and receive a new heart and a new spirit which only He can give!

Once God was your judge, harsh and unforgiving. Now... He's your Savior... who comes only to save you and give you His good gifts.

You see, God's attitude toward sin is that He hates it... but He continues to love those who are caught up in it. And, in Jesus' parable to the Pharisees, we learn that as long as a person lives on this earth... Jesus' offer of forgiveness and life... His offer of love and fellowship with Him... is *ever* present and *always* available!

I'd like to be able to say this in every sermon – because I'm confident every time we gather in this holy house, at least one person needs to hear it:

Jesus' offer of forgiveness is there to you... no matter what it is that's in your past. From His cross... He holds out His hands... inviting... welcoming back all His sons and daughters who have gone against His call to live a righteous life.

You see...

- ✓ God's will for you is that you would live, *not* die.
- ✓ God's will is that you live here on earth as the noble child of God that you are by virtue of your holy Baptism.
- ✓ God's will is that you would live forever... not in some sappy fake view of heaven where cherubs sing with funny looking harps. No! He wants you to live forever with Him and with all the saints of heaven who have gone before us... or who will come after us!

There's a Third Son not mentioned in this parable. In fact, you'll get to sing of Him in the second distribution hymn in a few minutes.

In hymn 438, *A Lamb Goes Uncomplaining Forth*... I pray that you open your mouth and sing with gusto of this Third Son who willingly did as the His Father commanded Him. This Son, Jesus Christ, perfectly conformed His will to that of His Father... *and ours*... and went forth to the "gladly suffer" the death that we are owed so that we might have the life that we don't deserve!

This Jesus, of Whom you'll sing, gladly gave His life – suffering, dying, and rising three days later so that you might be forgiven of your sins... and restored to be with Him in His kingdom forever and ever!

And so, dear beloved of God, turn from sin. Quit trying to play games with Him or trick Him... for *that* game is deadly... and you'll *never* win it.

In faith turn away from the life that's weak, deceitful, and caught up in a web of lies. Turn... or more properly said... *be turned* by God away from yourself and toward the Third Son who died and rose for you.

He gives Himself to you today. God in the flesh for your salvation. Come to the table of the Lord and receive the inheritance of a true child of God. He loves you. He forgives you. Live as His noble beloved one throughout time and into eternity! For Jesus' sake, and in His holy name. [Amen.]

The peace of God that passes all human understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus unto life everlasting. [Amen.]