

Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost  
October 11, 2020  
Lincoln Heights Lutheran Church  
**The Father Desires Repentant Action**

The candidates for election make promises during campaign speeches and debates. But campaign promises are one thing, keeping those promises is another. Does the person who is elected continue to advocate for the same policies they promised to support? Do they vote for legislation that is in line with their promises? One can fool the American people once or twice but if an elected official continues to promise one thing and then do another, they will likely lose the next election.

Jesus tells a parable to the Jews in Jerusalem for Passover. This is during Holy Week, just days before he will be crucified on Friday and then rise to life on Sunday. It is a parable about two sons whose promises do not match their actions. One of them is wrong to fail to keep his promise. However, the other son is correct and commended to us as an example of repentance. It is good to change your mind from sin to repentant action. The Father desire such repentant action from us as well. Hear again the parable of Christ from:

**Matthew 21:28-32 (NIV84)**

*“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.’<sup>29</sup> ‘I will not,’ he answered, but later he changed his mind and went.<sup>30</sup> Then the father went to the other son and said the same thing. He answered, ‘I will, sir,’ but he did not go.<sup>31</sup> 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.<sup>32</sup> 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.*

Jesus addressed this parable to the Jewish leaders. They were challenging him and questioning him during Holy Week. Perhaps Jesus would say something wrong and the people would stop listening to him. But, of course, Jesus always had the correct response. In this parable, Jesus directly confronts the Jewish leaders. They are the second son in the parable and they know it.

The Pharisees, Sadducees, chief priests and teachers of the law all claimed to be doing what God commanded them to do. They all claimed to be following the way of the Lord. In the Old Testament, God commanded the people to give him a tenth, the tithe. Therefore, the Pharisees said, “Yes, Lord” and gave him even a tenth of their garden herbs. The Lord commanded the people to observe the Sabbath by not working on Saturday. They said, “Yes, Lord” and made up rules about how far you could walk without it being considered work on the Sabbath. And the Lord tells the people in Ezekiel to repent and turn from their evil ways and they said, “What evil ways? Why would I need to repent? I’m always say yes to the Lord.”

I’m sure many of the Jewish leaders were sincere in their religious beliefs. They sincerely believed they had been doing exactly what God commanded. They could not believe that prophets like Ezekiel were talking about people like them. He must have only been talking to really bad people. They did not believe that John the Baptist was addressing them when he called for people to repent. Surely they were not the bad people of society. The soldiers, tax collectors

and other so called “sinners” could benefit from John the Baptist and the other repentance prophets but the Jewish leaders were doing just fine on their own. They were saying yes to God.

Can this second son attitude affect us Lutheran Christians too? Might we become convinced that the law of God is really for the criminals, abortionists, thieves, and adulterers? Those are the people that need to repent. But I’ve been a Christian for decades. I’ve been saying “Yes” to God for years. I don’t see the need for me to repent, at least not as much as others.

What a loving warning Jesus gives to all who have this second son attitude. *“I tell you the truth, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you.”* This is a warning because if one does not see the need for daily repentance, one will not be in the kingdom of God. This is a loving warning because Jesus is giving these enemies of his who will advocate for his crucifixion that very week an opportunity to repent. Jesus wants us to heed his loving warning and repent for our pride in thinking that we did not need to repent.

Then there is the first son. He rebelled immediately against his father’s request to go and work in the vineyard. Jesus tells us that the first son is like the tax collectors and prostitutes. Tax collectors were assumed to be using their positions to take more money than was owed or was right. Prostitutes were obviously making a living through sin. How could people whose lives and incomes depended on sinful actions be part of the kingdom of God? By changing their mind, by repentance and faith in Jesus. Zacchaeus the tax collector, repented and believed in Jesus, leading him to give away half of his possessions to the poor. His NO to the Lord changed to a YES and his repentance showed in his actions. Matthew, the tax collector and the one who wrote down the parable of the two sons, repented and followed Jesus. Or we can think of someone like Rahab, the prostitute, in the Old Testament. She believed the Lord was giving the land to the Hebrews and therefore hid the spies in Jericho before the walls came down. Then there is the woman who was caught in adultery by the Jewish leaders and brought before Jesus. Jesus forgives her sins and tells her to go and sin no more.

Certainly there are times we have been like the first son and said NO to God as our first response. God tells us to seek him and his kingdom first and we say, “No, I have lots of other fun things to do before seeking God’s kingdom.” The Lord tells us to flee from sexual immorality and we say, “No, I can handle that movie or that romance novel or that website without sinning.” The Lord asks us to give of our time to serve him - “I’m busy Lord.” He asks for our offerings. “That’s my money Lord.” Our reaction to the Lord God is too often from our sinful nature. “I will not.”

And notice that repentance is not only recognizing the sinful attitudes and rebellion we are guilty of. Repentance is actually going out to the vineyard. God our Father desires repentant action. It is not coming to church on Sunday only so you can do and say and act any way you want during the week. Repentance is hating the sin and turning away from it. Repentance is taking steps with God’s help to actually do what our Father in heaven asks of us. Our sinful nature will be with us and fight against our new nature in Christ until heaven. Therefore repentance shows in the struggle against sin, not in the surrender to sin. Repentance shows in daily seeking God’s forgiveness in Christ and the strength to battle temptations the next day.

The good news for all people is that we have a champion who has won the victory. Jesus is the perfect combination of the two sons in the parable. Jesus say “yes” to his Father and then goes and accomplishes his Father’s will. His Father asks him to take on human flesh and blood in order to be a true human – Yes, Father. Feel hunger, pain, thirst and exhaustion – Yes, Father.

Face the temptations of the devil and overcome every temptation – Yes, Father. Suffer the wrath of God for the sin of the world – Yes, Father, not my will but yours be done. Die to pay for all sin – Yes, Father into your hands I commit my spirit. Where we said NO, Jesus said YES. Where we said YES and failed, Jesus said YES and succeeded. Through faith we are now in Christ and are seen by God as Jesus is seen by his Father – a perfectly obedient child.

When the election is over and the newly elected challengers take office or incumbents resume their offices, they might keep their promises. Some will work diligently to do what they promised. Others will forget or get sidetracked or even change their minds and go back on what they promised. Our God has chosen us to be his people through faith in Christ Jesus. Where we have rebelled against our Father like the first son, let us repent. Where we have promised to to what our Father commands and failed or forgotten or gotten side tracked, let us repent. For we always know that we have a Savior who fulfills his promises. He has forgiven us. He will bring us to eternal life. These are promises we can depend on.

Amen.