

Pentecost 16 9/28/14
St. Matthew 21:23-32 21A

A MAN HAD TWO SONS. AND HE WENT TO THE FIRST AND SAID, "SON, GO AND WORK IN THE VINEYARD TODAY." AND HE ANSWERED, "I WILL NOT," BUT AFTERWARD HE CHANGED HIS MIND AND WENT.

So, was Judas repentant? We know from the Scriptures that after he betrayed Jesus, he was filled with remorse and tried to return the 30 pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders. He was so filled with shame and guilt that he hung himself, tragically taking his own life. So, was he repentant?

REPENTANCE is the focus of our worship this Sunday. Jesus tells us that the tax collectors and prostitutes were entering the kingdom of God before the chief priests and elders of the people. Please, hear me very clearly: they did not get into heaven because of what they were or because of what they had done or not done, they were entering the kingdom of heaven because they came to faith in Christ. They listened to the message of John the Baptist and the Word that John preached created faith. They saw their sin and believed in Jesus for forgiveness. In the words of John, they brought forth the fruits of faith in keeping with repentance.

I. But rather than repent, we offer excuses for sin. Like Adam and Eve, we blame someone else, just as Adam blamed God and Eve blamed the devil. We try to justify our behavior because "My Dad was strict," or "Mom wouldn't buy me Nikes like everyone else had." Or, in our self righteousness, we accuse our accuser, "Who are you to tell me how to live my life."

In our world today, there seems to be one excuse that trumps them all: “I can’t help it, I was born that way.” This is especially used today in the homosexual community to justify their lifestyle.

Let’s consider those words for a moment. Let’s say the elders come to set up for Communion Sunday morning and there is no wine. So they ask me, “Pastor, where’s the wine?” And I answer, “I drank it.” Let’s say the finance guys come to count the offering and all the cash is gone {this is a very bad time to wake up in the sermon, isn’t it?} and they say, “Pastor, what happened to the cash?” And I say, “I took it.” And you would say to me, “Pastor, Pastor, why did you do this ... how could you do such a thing?” And I answer, “I can’t help it, I WAS BORN THAT WAY.” Gonna buy it? Anyone? Anyone buying what I’m selling?

But think about this for a moment – I would not be lying to you. I told you the truth! What is true of me is true of you. Look at the words you confessed this morning, “WE CONFESS THAT WE ARE BY NATURE SINFUL AND UNCLEAN.” Moses says the same thing in book of Genesis, “The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually” (Ge 6:5). Jesus Himself teaches us this truth: “But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this defiles a person. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander (Mt 15:18-19).”

It is very true that we are by nature sinful and unclean – we are born sinners, and because we are, we daily sin much. The REAL question for us poor, miserable sinners is – does that make it ok – not simply in the eyes of the world that readily accepts sin, but in the eyes of God?

The Bible answers that question. Specifically, I draw your attention to the Paul's words to the Romans. He begins by saying that the Gentiles – remember, they had not received the Law from God – sin. Because they did not have the Law, does that excuse their sin? Paul answers that question in the 1st verse of chapter 2, “Therefore you have no excuse, O man (Ro 2:1).”

Jesus says it this way, “If you love me, you will keep my commandments (Jn 14:15).” And Ezekiel tells us what the price is for each and everyone one of us who do not keep the Commandments of God, “the soul who sins shall die (Ez 18).”

II. How glad we are for that 3rd Son in the Parable before us this morning! Wait a minute, Pastor, you say! The Father in the parable has only two sons. Yes. But, there is a third Son -- the Son who speaks the parable. From the very moment that we fell into the death of sin, the Father said, “Son, go and work today in the vineyard.” The Son said, “I will,” and He did exactly that, completely and perfectly doing what His Father wanted Him to do.

The Good News of the Gospel is that Jesus kept His promise, even when tempted in the wilderness; even when it meant sweating drops of blood in Gethsemane's garden. This Son acted in our place under the Law and fulfilled it for us. This Son perfectly obeyed His Father's will to go to the cross to suffer and die for the guilt of our sin. On the cross, this Son crushed the head of the father of all lies, Satan. On Easter morning, the Father raised His Son to life again, defeating death and grave for us.

III. Which brings us back to the focus of our worship this Sunday: The Christian life is the life of repentance. In our Old Testament lesson, God

says through the Prophet Ezekiel, “For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the LORD GOD; so turn – repent -- and live.”

Before I go any further, let me ask you: What is repentance? Allow me to quote question # 274 from our *Small Catechism*:

274. *Who are repentant believers?* Repentant believers are those who are sorry for their sins and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as their Savior.

Repentance is not simply being sorry. Repentance is not a guilty conscience. Repentance is not an act of your will or a choice you make.

Repentance is God’s work in you. Through His Word, God brings you to repentance, just as His Word brought the tax collectors and prostitutes to repentance. Repentance is not just being sorry; repentance is sorrow for sin and faith that God forgives us for the sake of Christ. As God forgives through His Word, He makes us new in Christ. He works a renewal of our whole life -- spirit, will, attitude, and desires, so that we daily strive to overcome sin and we keep the 10 Commandments, that is, we do good works to glorify our Father in heaven and serve our neighbor here, today.

Repentance is not a once in a lifetime thing. In the first of his 95 Theses, Martin Luther wrote: The Christian life is the life of repentance. In the Large Catechism, Luther teaches us that repentance nothing more than a daily return to the waters of our baptism. By daily contrition and repentance, the Old Adam, with all its love for sin and evil desires, is drowned and the new creation we are in Christ daily emerges and arises to live before God in righteousness and purity forever.

Now, we see ourselves in that first son: “And he answered, ‘I will not,’ but afterward he repented and went”. This first son is...

- you as a husband or wife, who on your wedding day, promised to love, comfort, and honor your spouse; who, through repentance, does, by word and deed, become a pious, God-fearing spouse to your wife or husband.
- you as a confirmed member of the congregation, who was asked in your Confirmation vows, if you would suffer all things, even death, rather than fall away from the Lord Jesus. Through repentance, you follow your Good Shepherd through the darkness of this valley of the shadow of death, being faithful to Jesus even to death.
- the child who is asked by his/her parent, “Are you getting ready for school?”, or “Are you doing your homework?”, answers, “yes,” because they are getting dressed and packing their backpack, or doing his/her homework, thus honoring and obeying those God has placed in authority over them.

Oh yes, I mentioned Judas. So, was Judas repentant? The answer: No. Most certainly, he was sorry, he was filled with guilt, shame, and remorse, but he was not repentant. He was so filled with doubt and despair that God would forgive his sin that, tragically and sadly, he ended his own life.

The Christian life is the life of repentance. Daily, the mirror of God’s Law shows us our sin. We confess those sins to Jesus and what joy is our, that He forgives, and forgives, and forgives.