

Trinity 10 – St. Matthew 21:28-31
Jesus Did the Will of His Father

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We pray: Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin!... Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones that you have broken rejoice....Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will return to you. ^(Ps.51:1,2,8,13) Amen.

In the name of the Father, who graciously sent His Son to earth, and of the ☩ Son, who obediently came and labored for you, and of the Holy Spirit, who proceeds from the Father and the Son so that you may believe the kingdom of God is open to you.

Dear fellow redeemed,

One time the Prophet Nathan came to King David and told him a sad story about two neighbors. One, the poor neighbor, had only one sheep, which he cared for as tenderly as one of his children. The other was rich and had many sheep out in the pastures. One night, a traveler came to the rich man, but instead of killing one of his own sheep, he took the poor man's only and cherished sheep and prepared it for the guest.

The story worked, just as God and Nathan had intended it to. David fumed with anger and condemned the man immediately.

Our text is the same kind of story. Let's see if it works.

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We read as follows in Jesus' name.

[Jesus said,] **"What do you think? 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. And he went to the other son and said the same. And he answered, 'I go, sir,' but did not go. Which of the two did the will of his father?" They said, "The first." Jesus said to them, "Truly, I say to you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes go into the kingdom of God before you.** ^(ESV) *So far the Words of our text.*

These are Your Words, heavenly Father.

Sanctify [us] in the Truth. Your Word is Truth. ^(John 17:17)

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This parable was told on Tuesday of Holy Week.

Jesus rode into Jerusalem on the foal of a donkey on Sunday. He had cleansed the temple of money-changers and merchants on Monday.

And on Tuesday, spent the day teaching in the temple.

The chief priests and the elders of the people came up to Him as he was teaching, and said, "By what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?" ^{Matt.21:23}
(Obviously, they were not too pleased with Jesus' earlier actions.)

But they weren't inquiring out of curiosity.

Their intent was to discredit whatever authority Jesus claimed and tout their own authority as that passed down from God through Moses to Aaron, the first High Priest. Their goal was to make Jesus look foolish in front of the crowds. He was teaching in hopes that they would reject Him.

In the face of this antagonism, Jesus masterfully turned the tables. He made them, the supposed "authorities" of judging doctrine, assert before the same crowds that they didn't know whether John the Baptizer was a true prophet or not.

But He wasn't done with them yet. Enter our text.

He told this parable to make them condemn themselves.

But let us be clear, Jesus didn't do this to make them look bad, or to show off His superior wit and cunning.

His was for a two-fold purpose.

1st - So that they might see their own failings and repent.

2nd - So the people could witness the words and actions of their chief priests and elders and judge whether they were being true to God's Word or false.

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By this parable, Jesus disarmed them from any attempts to twist what He otherwise would have said.

He told a story like Nathan's, that had an obvious answer, but on its face, seemed to have nothing to do with their immediate circumstances.

They were forced to admit the truth, but realize it's consequences only after they had condemned themselves.

Jesus sure showed them, didn't He?

How many of the people chuckled to themselves? "Oh, snap."

How foolish did the chief priests and elders feel?

We know that **the chief priests perceived that He was speaking about them**, they felt the divine burn.

We also know that they weren't as receptive to the admonition as was David once they were self-condemned.

David, upon hearing the conclusion of Nathan's parable said, **"As the LORD lives, the man who has done this deserves to die."** Nathan immediately responded, **"You are the man!"** ^{2Sam.12:5,7}

David was cut to the heart. He knew the truth of his guilt and felt the burn of hell opening its mouth for him.

How often had Nathan spoken to him during this time that, under the cloak of piety and concern for Bathsheba's welfare,

David was covering up their adulterous affair and his murder of innocent and loyal Uriah?

He was that rich man who stole his neighbors sheep.

He was the son who said he would do his father's will, but did not.

Thankfully, that was not the end of David & Nathan's story.

David then responded to Nathan's, **"You are the man!"** with, **"I have sinned against the LORD."** ^{2Sam.12:13}

And Nathan [immediately] said to David, "The LORD also has put away your sin; you shall not die."

So then David was also the son who **afterward...**

changed his mind and went and did the will of his Father.

He believed the Lord's forgiveness and responded accordingly.

Sadly, the same cannot be said of those chief priests and elders.

They didn't receive Jesus' admonition in humility.

Instead, their self condemnation hardened their hearts, so that they desired to arrest Him, ultimately to kill Him.

The opportunity didn't present itself right then and there, for **they feared the crowds, because they held Him to be a prophet.**

But by Thursday night and on into Friday morning, they followed through on their intents and, under the cloak of piety and concern for the people's welfare, murdered the innocent and loyal Jesus.

It is sad that they were the son who said, **"I go, sir," but did not**, but even sadder that afterward, when again called to repent by the apostles along with the proof of Jesus' resurrection, they refused to change their minds.

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Brothers and sisters in our crucified and risen Christ,

What do you think?

The Father says to you, "Love your neighbor."

And what is your response: "I will"?

And yet your neighbor remains unloved, uncared for,
unprayed for, judged and condemned by you.

The Father says to you, "Trust Me."

And what is your response: "I will"?

And yet you distress and worry about your family,
your finances, your reputation, your country, your church.

Have you been standing before God, here in His house today,
offering up prayers like the Pharisee's in our Gospel text,
"I thank you, God, that I am not like other men: chief priests,
extortioners, Presidents, Pharisees, prostitutes, the unjust,
tax collectors, or even as these presidential candidates"?

"You are the man." You are the son. You know the truth.
Do you feel the burn of hell fire licking at your feet?
Here you sit, judging and condemning these chief priests,
but you are guilty of the same things.

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Do you see what Jesus is doing here?

He's using this true story about His run in with the priests,
that, on its face, seems to have nothing to do with you
and your immediate circumstances,
but is leading you to judge your own actions, or inactions.

"You are the man." You are the son.... But which son?

Well, notice that Jesus didn't give you the option of the 3rd Son,
the One and only Son that, when His Father sent Him to work,
responded both with, **"I go, Sir,"** and then went and did it.

This was not any of us. We are either one of the other two.

No, this could only be the Son of God, Jesus Christ.

He alone fulfilled the will of His Father: perfect obedience.

Even in the face of such antagonism, He loved.

He spoke to correct His adversaries and so save them.

Even as He hung bearing your sins in God's forsakenness,

He trusted His Father's wisdom and mercy,
never worrying or distressing about how the Father
through Jesus' sacrifice would show His love for you.

His prayer, even in His own physical and spiritual suffering,
was not, "I thank You that I am not like them,"

but "I thank You that I am one of them.

And I give to You, on their behalf, My perfect life
and innocent death. Father, forgiven them."

It is this Son who speaks to the first son and asks you
the question, **"What do you think?"**

It's this Son who convinces the first son to change his mind,
to humbly confess **"I have sinned against the LORD."**

It's this Son who sends His Holy Spirit to show you the other side
of the conversation, the side where sinners, real sinners,

like Pharisees/tax collectors, husbands/wives, adulterers,
singles, divorcees, widows,
fathers/mothers, sons/daughters,
sisters/brothers, orphans

employers&employees, the unjust,
gov't officials and their candidates/citizens&criminals,
pastors and parishioners alike,

learn to take comfort b/c the Kingdom of God is open to you.

It's this Son who speaks through His ministers, declaring to you,
"The LORD also has put away your sin; you shall not die."

and sing with David and your fellow forgiven sinners,
the words of David's penitential psalm
used in the "Create in Me" on page 70.

Soli Deo Gloria

*Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit,
Because it is this Son who causes you, the first son, to rise*