

In Jesus' name. **Amen.**

Before we dive in to the text. It will be helpful to set the stage a little: It is Holy Monday or Tuesday.

Jesus triumphantly entered Jerusalem on the colt of a donkey on Palm Sunday.

On Monday morning, He cursed the fruitless fig tree & **cleared the temple of those bought and sold**, and then sat down and proceeded to teach the people in the temple.

And now, **the chief priests and elders of the people** had come to challenge Him.

They ask, "**By what authority are You doing these things and who gave You this authority?**"

Jesus won't answer unless they answer His question about St. John's baptism:

**"Was it from God or from man?"** to which they, cowardly, gave no answer.

It is at this point that Jesus breaks into this parable...

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*Our text for meditation... 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."

For 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.<sup>(ESV)</sup>

*This is Your Word, heavenly Father; **sanctify us in the truth, Your Word is Truth.** Amen.* (John 17:17)

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You can hear Jesus' frustration with them, can't you?

Here was the time of their gracious visitation; Jesus, the long-awaited Messiah was physically present, yet these religious leaders had rejected Him for their own self-righteousness.

At this point, Jesus has only 3 or 4 more days before His death... at their hands.

He has been preaching and teaching of the kingdom of God, He has brought it near to them, even with powerful signs and miracles, yet they have refused to repent and believe in Him.

So now His parables and teaching become even less veiled and more sharp.

He doesn't have time to gently lead them anymore, and they haven't been following anyway.

Now, He simply tells them what way they are on, & it isn't **the way of righteousness** like John taught.

He is clear with them, their unrepentance excludes them from the Kingdom of God;

even **the tax collectors and the prostitutes were entering the Kingdom of God** by faith, repenting and believing in God's chosen Savior.

This would have been a very shocking statement to these 1st century people:

to think that such public sinners, who had defiled themselves with greed and lust... and other sins... were in the kingdom, while these outwardly pious religious leaders were outside the gates.

But these religious leaders were the son in Jesus' parable who answered, "**I go, sir,**" but did not. They had heard the call of God.

In fact, according to their office, they were to be sounding that call for others as well.

And yet, they not only did not go. They would not go. Nor would they lead others there.

I am guessing that we can all relate to this son.

Dad says, "please take out the trash," and we acknowledge him, "I will, Dad,"

but are so wrapped up in our video game, or scrolling the internet, or in a book, or on the phone, or just anything else, or nothing else, and simply do not do it.

The reality of it is, of course, we did not want to do it.

We weren't eager to please him and certainly didn't want to take out the dirty, smelly trash.

Wasn't it sometimes intentional, hoping that he will just forget about his request, or do it himself, or have someone else do it.

And let's be honest, it is just kids that do this.

Adults also put off undesirable responsibilities, whether procrastinating, or playing video games, or simply hoping that someone else will do it instead.

But this is a dangerous game when we are talking about the teachings of Jesus.

We only have a limited time here and it can end rather unexpectedly, a sudden illness, a car accident, a heart attack...

It is dangerous to feign attention and obedience to the Lord's Word, but then to ignore or neglect it.

After a while, like the Jewish leaders, your heart becomes so calloused to it, that eventually, unless the Lord intervenes, you can end up outright rejecting it.

And if you doubt this, look around you, not to those who you see, but those who you don't see.

These pews used to be so full that we needed two services to fit everyone.

Children, siblings, uncles and aunts and cousins, and countless friends and fellow Christianity 101 and confirmation classmates used to fill these pews.

Certainly some have died or moved away, but how many still live in the area, still claim to be Christian, yet they do not feed their faith.

How many are struggling with their Christian identity, yet they don't return to be strengthened.

How many do you fear have now outright rejected Christ and His teaching at this time, yet still desire to appear outwardly religious?

These were once with you. They heard and were taught the same things as you.

This is not to make you proud that you have yet remained, but to humble you to recognize how easy it is for you, who share the same sinful nature to go down the same path.

You can see then, how dangerous pretending attention and obedience to God's Word and work is.

You have come to the Divine Service for how long now?

You have heard how many sermons, how many readings, and yet, is it in one ear and out the other?

You forget the message as soon as you walk out the door?

Like hearing Dad tell you to take out the trash, but becoming so enwrapped in life that you forget or hope that no one will notice when you disregard Christ's teaching?

Simply being present at the Divine Service does not make one a Christian.

Simply living a moral life, keeping one's self from obvious or public sins, is not the **way of righteousness**.

Hypocrites can attend the Divine Service regularly or maintain an outward show of morality just as they did in Jesus' day.

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But did you notice that in Jesus' parable, neither one of the sons was perfect?

The one said he would go, but didn't.

The other son disrespectfully said he wouldn't go... but then what did he do?

It wasn't just that he went and did it, but he says that he "changed his mind and went."

The Greek word here actually has a stronger sense.

It expresses remorse or regret, as when Judas regretted having betrayed Jesus. Matthew 27:3

This son recognized the wrong that he had done, the disrespect that he had shown...and was grieved.

By his actions, we see what else was in his heart... we see the fruit of repentance.

He was sorry to have grieved his father and so he went into the vineyard to work.

This one did the will of his father, not just that he now did what was asked,

but he repented, he humbled himself, acknowledging the father's right and worthiness to have his service.

But is it just that felt he should do it?

This is not how our heavenly Father desires our services, not motivated by fear of punishment, but by love and gratitude.

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Dear fellow redeemed,

It is no secret that we are these two sons.

You are in a constant battle against your sinful nature,

fighting greed and lust and feelings of self-righteousness, coveting the ability to do your own will.

When admonished to do your heavenly Father's will, to put away these evil thoughts and actions, at times you say you will, but don't.

at other times you say you won't, but then repent and do.

But you need more. A whole lot more because your heavenly Father is not like your earthly father.

He does not simply forget your trespasses.

He demands, not good intentions or eventual obedience, but perfection.

He requires the perfect, "I go, Sir," AND the perfect going and working in the vineyard.

Do you see where this is going?

Here the Father sent another Son, His only-begotten Son to do your work,

not because you wouldn't, but because you couldn't.

And in His mercy, the Son of God answered His Father with a perfect "**I go, Sir**" and willingly humbled Himself **by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.**

**And being found in human form, He humbled Himself** (still further)

**by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.** Philippians 2:7-8

His death is the atonement for your lust, and greed, and covetousness, and unwillingness to work, as well as for your negligence to attend to your heavenly Father's His Word of grace and comfort.

And even now, He delights to continue serving you,

continually working in you through His Holy Spirit to renew your heart,

to give you a remorseful, humble heart that repents and desires to do His Father's will.

He continues to send to you His ministers, like John the Baptist, to preach repentance,

and to wash your sins away in Holy Baptism, and to pronounce to you,

"Your sins are forgiven in Jesus' name."

He continues to be sent by His Father into this world to give Himself to you in His body and blood, to forgive your "I will not"s, and to strengthen your "I go, Sir"s.

The Lord grant each of you a humble heart to continually receive your Lord in this your time of grace so that you may live in His forgiveness, and willingly work in the joy and certainty of His pleasure, until He calls you away from your labors and grants you His eternal rest.

In Jesus' name. **Amen.**

*Soli Deo Gloria*