
TIME FOR ACTION

I've spent several days this week contemplating what a luxury it would be not to preach on this text.

- I've thought about talking about the Philippians or the Ezekiel text, rather than trying to preach on the Parable of the Two sons.
 - Understand, though, that my desire to pass by this text is not because it is difficult to talk about;
 - it's not because it is necessarily touchy or difficult for Christians to deal with or to understand.
- Rather, my problem is just the opposite.
- This parable is just too simple, too clear, too obvious.
 - It's as though there just isn't anything that needs to be said about this parable.

Yet, sometimes we need to struggle with the simple texts to find out what it is that our Lord is trying to say to us.

- Sometimes we need to dig deeper to see if there is something more there,
- something that applies to our lives, our situation.
 - And this is the sense I have with this text—that there is more to this parable.
 - So, in spite of the temptation to go elsewhere, we're going to take a look at this story.

JESUS told a parable about a man who had two sons.

- The man went to the first one and said, "Son, I want you to work in vineyard today."
 - The son was in somewhat of a rebellious mood and answered, "Forget it, Dad!"
 - But afterwards, he repented and went to work.
- The father also went to the second son and made the same request of him.
 - "Sure, Pop," said the second son, but he never went.
 - "Which son," JESUS asked, "did the will of his father?"

Like most of JESUS' parables, we see here perfect representations of human nature.

- The response of the first son is that of resentful protest.
 - "No. I won't go. How dare you ask me to that! You know I had other plans!"
- Many of you who are parents have encountered that same kind of response at one time or another.
 - We all know people whose first response to anything is always, "No."
 - But fortunately, many of them have good hearts, and if they have time to reconsider and see the worth of the project, they will eventually pitch in and be the best workers around.
 - That was the first son.

I believe that JESUS wanted us to see that it was the second son who was the difficult case.

- He was not a rebellious protester.
- Rather he was a well-intentioned procrastinator.
- He was like many of us.
 - There are many people who are nice, friendly, basically Christian people who will never argue, never criticize, never give you a moment of heartache, and yet getting them to actually do anything is near impossible.

One fellow of this sort was laid off from his job.

- He asked his employer for a letter of recommendation.
 - His boss wrote a note that read like this:
 - "To whom it may concern: If you can get this man to work for you, you will be extremely fortunate."

Two businessmen were talking about a friend of theirs who had passed away.

- "I understand," said one of them sadly, "that he left behind him very few personal effects."
 - The other one replied, "That's because he had very few personal causes."
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A close reading of the gospels will reveal that JESUS intended HIS followers to be action-oriented to an extraordinary degree.

- HE wanted HIS followers to have many personal causes.
 - I don't mean that HE wanted us to keep busy for the sake of keeping busy.
- I've seen churches like that.
 - They have a terrific calendar of activities, but very few of those activities are meaningful in bringing persons closer to the Kingdom of GOD.
- What JESUS did mean is for us to give witness to our inner experience through outward acts of service.
 - The Good Samaritan was not "good" because he studied his Sunday school lesson, as important as that is.
 - No, he was good because he saw a stranger in need and acted by going to his aid.
- The rich young ruler missed out on the Kingdom, not because he was immoral.
 - He testified that he kept the commandments for the time he was a lad.
 - He missed the Kingdom because he was not willing to let go of his possessions, give them to the poor, and follow JESUS.

During the Revolutionary War, a young man is reported to have come to George Washington and said, "General Washington, I want you to know that I believe in you and your cause. I fully support you."

- Washington graciously thanked him and asked in what regiment he served.
 - The young man answered, "Oh. I'm not in the army. I'm just a civilian."
- The general replied, "Young man, if you believe in this cause, then join the army. Put on a uniform. Get yourself a rifle and fight."

That's CHRIST'S summons to us.

- If we believe in HIM and the cause for which HE died, then we are called to take up HIS cross and walk in HIS footsteps,
 - to "stand up for JESUS" doing those good things that HE would do if HE were here with us in the flesh today.

Let me suggest three characteristics that we might work to develop as followers of CHRIST.

The first is AVAILABILITY.

- A man applied for a job as a handy man.
 - But he couldn't do carpentry, electrical work, or plumbing.
 - When asked what was so handy about him, the man replied, "I live just around the corner."

Sometime the greatest ability we can have is availability.

- To be where GOD can call us to serve.
 - That's one of the reasons why worship and Bible study are important.
 - It is in these settings that a need spoken or a vision cast can be heard as GOD invites us to address a need about which GOD cares.

The second characteristic is SENSITIVITY.

- A young Jewish boy was living in a small Polish village during World War II.
 - The Nazis came and rounded up his family along with all the Jews in the area.
 - The captives were then made to dig a ditch for their own graves.
 - When the machine gun fire began, the bodies began to fall into the shallow grave.
- But the boy was not hit by the bullets, though he was splattered with blood.
 - He fell into the grave and pretended to be dead.
 - Because the grave was shallow, the dirt thrown on top was not enough to prevent him from breathing.
- Later, when it was dark, he climbed out of the grave and begged for help.
 - But when people saw him and recognized him as one of the Jews, they screamed for him to go away.
 - Finally, in desperation, he knocked on a door, and just before the lady that answered could tell him to leave, he cried out, "Don't you recognize me? I am the JESUS you say you love."
 - With tears streaming down her face, the woman picked up the boy and took him inside to safety.

Sometimes we need to be reminded that when we serve the least of these, we serve JESUS.

The third characteristic of discipleship is ACCOUNTABILITY.

- A nun won the admiration of her entire community with her patience, cheerfulness, and genuine concern for others.
 - She gave more of herself than anyone could expect.
 - Her salary was meager, but she was generous with what she had.
- One day a friend said, "Why don't you get out of this little town and go where they will pay you a decent salary. GOD knows you're worth it."
 - With a smile she kindly answered, "If GOD knows I'm worth it, that's all that matters."

Does GOD know you're worth it?

- GOD needs laborers for the vineyard.
 - Can GOD count on you?
- If you truly want to serve, to work in GOD'S vineyard, seek to develop the qualities of availability, sensitivity, and accountability to GOD.
 - Recognize that in GOD'S Kingdom, it's always time for action.