

Sermon 1615

Matthew 21.28-32

October 15, 2017

Jesus was driving them crazy. Sunday he came riding into town and riots broke out. Well, not riots exactly. Impromptu parades. People singing and laughing and dancing, right into the Temple courts. People were happy to be at church. That had to stop.

Then he objected to all the fund raisers they were having. The sheep stalls and the tables of the money changers practically blocked the entrances so people couldn't get in. The cattle were mooing so loudly you couldn't hear the sermon. Why didn't anybody ever clean up all that manure? They objected to Jesus' objections! How were they ever supposed to keep the place going? People weren't just going to give out of the goodness of their hearts, were they?

Then Jesus started teaching Bible classes in the Temple. They tried to nip that in the bud right away. Where are your credentials? Where's your Seminary diploma? "By whose authority are you doing all these things?" And Jesus actually answered them! "Well, by the same authority that John the Baptist baptized! Who do you think told him to do what he did?"

It was clear Jesus was waiting for an answer and so were the crowds who were packing his Bible class. (Why didn't they come to Caiaphas' Bible class? His two volume book on filleting the tensor fascia latae from the middle gluteal tendon had received critical acclaim!). "We don't know," they lied. They knew very well. They thought John was a fraud because he had never attended a day at Jerusalem U studying under them, but you couldn't say that in front of this crowd. And Jesus was a rabble rouser just like John. "Then I won't tell you, either," Jesus said, with a wink to the clapping crowd.

Oh, if only Mary had been barren! Jesus was driving them crazy. He was even trying to get them to

#### Change Your Mind About Jesus

1. No doesn't have to stay no.
2. A lot of the others have said yes.

"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." "I will not," he answered, but later he changed his mind and went. Then the father went to the other son and said the same thing. He answered, "I will, sir," but he did not go. Which of the two did what his father wanted?" "The first," they answered (28-31).

Change your mind about Jesus. No doesn't have to stay no.

I think we can identify with this story. We like to identify with the hero, which in this story is Jesus. But don't jump too quickly to that conclusion. Both sons, in essence, said "No" to their father, said "No" to God, for the father in the story represents God and the two sons represent the entire human race.

One group absolutely says no to God, but their no doesn't stay no. They change their mind about Jesus. The other group, since they don't do what the Father wants them to do, in essence have said "No" to God by their actions, even though they seem to say "Yes" on the surface. So the whole human race says "No" to God. At first.

What is Jesus getting at? How do we say "No" to God?

Coming into the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation, it is impossible to overlook humanity's universal "No" to God. That sea to shining sea "No" to God is work-righteousness. We think we are doing God favors and he better notice. Of course elements and teachings in the medieval Roman Catholic Church promoted work righteousness. The Mass promoted work-righteousness. The priest offered the bloodless body of Christ to the Father as a renewed sin sacrifice to cover all in attendance that day, so if you skipped Mass, watch out! Your sins weren't forgiven! There would be penance to pay! This idea that "grace is the unmerited beginning of justification, but moved by the Holy Spirit we can merit for ourselves all the graces needed to attain eternal life" is still spooking around. Of course we recognize that as a form of work-righteousness. It's not as bad as, say Hinduism, where a person creates his own destiny. But anything that makes man partly responsible for his salvation robs God of his glory and empties the meaning of grace. Gifts are not earned. Allowances may be a sign of the generosity of your parents, but you still have to do something to earn your allowance. If you don't do your chores, trouble!

There's only one grace, Luther said. Justifying grace sanctifies. When the Holy Spirit creates faith in a person's heart, they receive God's declaration that they are not guilty of sin and are at the same time holy and blameless in his sight.

But work-righteousness lives in Lutheran hearts, also. Let me take money for an example. In the early days of our congregation we devoted three or four weeks in October to teaching stewardship in the sermons. That's why October was favorite hymn month. A spoonful of sugar makes the medicine go down! What is the lie of work-righteousness when it comes to offerings? Paying the bills. Meeting the budget. Treating what we give the Lord in the offering plate like what we put in the mail to Nevada Energy or the Home Mortgage Company. Looking at church as yet one other bill to pay is making a Law out of coming to church. It's what we do for God. And boy, he better be pleased. And the pastors better notice! So some people, when they don't get special recognition, huff and puff and stay away. They deserve special recognition for all they give and do for the church, because money talks!

But money doesn't talk here. The Gospel talks. So this parable of Jesus is directed at us, too. We all, in our sin-warped view, think we are doing God great and wonderful favors.

Change your mind about Jesus. Our "No" doesn't have to stay "No." The first son changed his mind. What changed his mind? Jesus doesn't say. But I know

what changes our minds. It's the Gospel. "You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich (2 Corinthians 8.9)." "In view of God's mercy, offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship (Romans 12.1)."

When we look at all Jesus has done for us, how can we not be moved? He left heaven to walk on this earth, teaching us his ways, showing us the path to heaven, making that path to heaven by his holy, sinless life and his innocent sufferings and death. Then look at the earthly blessings Jesus has given us! A family! We didn't deserve that. A home! A job or a secure retirement. Good government, good schools, good weather (especially now). A life well spent. Look at all these blessings of the Lord! Now what percentage of what he has given you do you want to return to him as a thank offering? That's a heart motivated by Gospel, not Law. That heart focuses on what God has done for us and cheerfully, generously responds. We give in proportion to what the Lord has given us, not to pay the bills.

There are lots of things in our life like that. Being a Mom or a Dad. Is it work and we aren't appreciated? Or are we handmaidens of the Lord, stewards of the Holy Spirit, wisely nurturing the precious gifts of life he has entrusted to our care? I could go on and on enumerating each stage of our lives, showing how a Law view of things robs us of the Gospel joy God wants us to have. But you see my point.

Your no doesn't have to stay no. Change your mind about Jesus, especially because a lot of the others have said yes.

"Jesus said to them, 'I tell you the truth, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you. 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 (31b-32).'"

That was the greatest irony of Jesus' life. The religious people would have nothing to do with him, but the common people, the down-trodden and despised, they flocked to Jesus. And when they came to Jesus, they were changed. Tax collectors? They were like today's waiters who make their living on tips. Who tips a tax man? Nobody! But if he has the say on how much you pay, and the force of law is backing him up, why, he can write his own tip on your tax bill! Some of the tax collectors made a very tidy sum! And the writer of this Gospel was one of them, who left his tax collection booth and became a disciple of Jesus. Matthew!

You would think the religious establishment, all the good people who thought they could earn their way to heaven, yet were having a hard time keeping their own family and friendships going, you would think all these religious people would take notice. Change was in the air—the change that comes from repentance. Faithful hearts were turning their lives over to God.

If you fancied yourself smart with money, and you noticed that a lot of people who three years ago didn't have two coins to rub together, were now suddenly living pretty well in the neighborhood, wouldn't you want in on the action? If your business model was a little tired and the sales figures were showing their age, but a young upstart company bursts on the scene with a product no better than yours and service about the same as yours, wouldn't you study them to find out their secret? Of course you would! So would I! That's what smart money does.

I wonder if that's why God chooses the lowly, the humble, those that are not, to shame those who seem to be something, the high and the mighty. I wonder if that's why through the foolishness of the cross God reaches human hearts so that we can see that human thirst for miracles is a dangerous addiction and that enshrinement of wisdom is but a cheap Hollywood set. I know the Apostle Paul felt that way. His people, the Jews, had largely rejected the Savior of the Jews, Jesus. He wrote, "Because of their transgression, salvation has come to the Gentiles to make Israel envious. I make much of my ministry in the hope that I may somehow arouse my own people to envy and save some of them (Romans 11.12, 14)." The salvation of those you never expected to be believers should lead to a reexamination from those you always thought would be believers. "Hop on the Jesus bandwagon," God encourages, "I won't mind at all."

Change your mind about Jesus. A lot of the others have said yes.

Here's where this parable of Jesus really hits home with us. For most of us, we've been believers from our earliest days. Our parents brought us to Jesus through baptism when we were babies and toddlers, so the Holy Spirit gave us our faith right from those early years. We've been saying "Yes" to God for quite some time, now. But you know what happens when you do something for a long time and don't quite put your heart into it. It gets old. It gets boring. It gets stale. Instead of looking at the good we start picking the lint off the jacket.

No, really. You've got a great classic dress or suit and you wear it year after year, and people still comment on how nice it looks on you, but all we can do is notice a button hanging loose or some thread sticking out of a hem. For the politically inclined—and I know there are a lot here—all I have to mention is the bare minimum responsibilities of citizens in a democracy. Vote! What harm comes when we get tired of that!

The devil would want to make Jesus something we wear on our sleeve, someone we claim affiliation with, even if we don't approve of everything that is going on. It gets old. It gets ho-hum. Our church attendance drops, but something worse happens. We drop. We sink. We fall before depression and fear, bitterness and outrage. We actually have friends who interrupt our doleful recounting of our day with a "So, tell me one good thing that happened to you today."

Then look to some unexpected leaders. Look to the children coming up for Good News for Kids. Look to the Sunday School children singing their songs for us and putting on a Christmas pageant in just a few months for us. Look at the joy and excitement on their faces. Why can't I have that? Why can't you have that? Don't we have the same Savior? Don't we have the same forgiveness? I know this is a danger, because whenever we sing the "Create in Me," there's that part about "restore unto me the joy of your salvation."

The only thing that has to change is you. The only thing I have to change is my mind.

#### Change Your Mind About Jesus

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If the truth be told, Jesus is always going to drive us crazy, that sinful human nature part of us. Everything that leads to comfortable complacency he is going to overturn. Everything that leads to useless self-satisfaction, he is going to drive out. But in its place he will leave life and drive and purpose and a future and love, God's forgiving love for us which we reflect to those around us. Jesus is always going to drive us crazy. Embrace him. Don't put a restraining order on him.