

Living the Gospel in Everyday Life....



26th Sunday in Ordinary Time
September 25, 2011
Matthew 21:28-32



What's Going On Here?

GOSPEL: Jesus said to the chief priests and elders of the people: "What is your opinion? A man had two sons. He came to the first and said, 'Son, go out and work in the vineyard today.' He said in reply, 'I will not, ' but afterwards changed his mind and went. The man came to the other son and gave the same order. He said in reply, 'Yes, sir, 'but did not go. Which of the two did his father's will?" They answered, "The first." Jesus said to them, "Amen, I say to you, tax collectors and prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God before you. When John came to you in the way of righteousness, you did not believe him; but tax collectors and prostitutes did. Yet even when you saw that, you did not later change your minds and believe him."

IT'S WHAT'S INSIDE THAT COUNTS. Jesus certainly had to be on his toes when it came to responding to questions about his authority and mission in the world of his day. In that patriarchal culture, where it was at least a serious breach of the social standards, and could even be a matter of life and death, to say no to one's father, Jesus knew exactly what he was doing with the stories of the two brothers. "Don't judge a book by its cover," could easily be translated here: "Don't judge a person by religious appearance." The brother who refused his father's request could be written off as ungrateful and rebellious, while the other appears to be obedient. They both allow us into their hearts via their behavior. An open heart hears the words of Jesus. The seeds of love take root in that open - sometimes broken - heart and begin to grow. As the young faith is nurtured, it grows and bears fruit in loving behavior toward others. Jesus knows our human limitation. He knows our behavior won't always be the best. And, most important, he knows our hearts - just as he knew the hearts of the the people of his day, including the chief priests and elders who rejected him, the ones who received him, the tax collectors and prostitutes who turned their lives around because they recognized him. How sad that his challengers could not rejoice when those who were labeled "sinners" chose the kingdom of God over their past lives. Jesus reminds them that that they didn't believe John the Baptist either. His purpose wasn't just to trick them at their own game. He hoped they might finally hear his message of love. How generous our God is in giving us one opportunity after another to recognize the kingdom in our midst. How persistently God continues to call us to personal growth within the community of believers. How tenderly God touches our hearts, offering seeds of love for tending there. We become more whole, we enter wholly into God's will, when that which is in our hearts and that which we do are one. It's a journey toward holiness and Jesus became one of us so that he could walk with us and show us the way.

Questions For Reflection

- * *How do I feel when my heart, my thinking, and my actions aren't "in sync"?*
- * *How can this gospel help me to make good judgments - about myself and others?*
- * *How can both patience and honesty help me on my journey toward holiness?*