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Peace, Sun Prairie  
October 15, 2017  
Pentecost 19

**Matthew 21:28-32**  
**“Which son are you?”**

*How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! Amen. Dear friends in Christ,*

When it comes to repentance, there are only two kinds of people in this world. The first are those who *need* to repent. And the second are those who *need* to repent! Yes, I said that correctly! All people need repentance, not just the hardened unbeliever outside of the church, but also those who fill the seats inside every Sunday and those who fill the pulpit.

Jesus helps us see this in his story about two sons, neither of whom at first, did what their father wanted.

Both sons in the story needed repentance: one to turn from his open disobedience and the other to turn from his “obedience” that was just disobedience in disguise.

And since we are included among the all who need repentance, the sons in Jesus’ story also describe us in one way or another. So let us ask: **Which son are You?**

Jesus speaks of God as a dear loving Father who asks his sons to go **work... in the vineyard**. Without so much as a breath of respect, the first son disobeys His father right to his face. *I will not*. I’m not doing what you want. I want it my way.

Jesus first used this son to describe obviously disobedient people of his day: **the tax collectors and the prostitutes**. The **tax collectors** were notorious for using their position to steal and cheat to get ahead for their own gain. That openly goes against God’s command to not steal.

**Prostitutes** lived their lives in defiance of everything God says about marriage, family and sexuality, that God’s gift of sex belongs only in the relationship of the marriage of one man and one woman.

I'm sure we could come up with plenty of modern examples of people who openly defy what God says in the Bible. Clearly such people need to repent, a total change.

And that's exactly what happened to some who listened to John the Baptist preach God's Word. **But later (the first son) changed his mind and went. John came to you to show you the way of righteousness and... the tax collectors and the prostitutes did (*believe him*).**

Just as Jesus talks about here, Luke's Gospel specifically mentions how **tax collectors** were among the people who repented at John's teaching, confessing their sins deserved God's judgment. They then trusted John's message of forgiveness through trust in the Savior, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, even the sins of **tax collectors** and **prostitutes**.

Personally forgiven by John in their baptisms, such **tax collectors** went on to live for God in the joy of forgiveness, listening to John encourage them to do what God's Word says is right, by **not collecting any more** money than they were **required**.

Our God amazingly forgives even the worst sinful past and through the gift of faith in Jesus equips believers to live new lives for Him!

But the other son answered his Father with: '**I will, sir.**' How polite and respectful he was. He wouldn't be like the rude, disobedient son who openly defied his father.

**But he did not go.** Oh he said the right things. But he didn't actually do what His father wanted! He was every bit as disobedient as his brother, he just wasn't as honest about it! He too needed to **repent.**

With this son, Jesus was confronting the unbelief of the religious leaders: **You did not repent and believe (John).** The religious leaders, especially the Pharisees saw themselves as the obedient children of God. They were active in worship and gave generously of their wealth. They considered the Bible to be the inspired word of God and were so concerned about keeping God's laws they even added extra ones.

But they lacked the perfect heart and life the Holy God requires. Like all our people they were sinful, but they just refused to see it. And so they saw no need for a Savior like Jesus. And so they didn't do what God

wants: they did not **repent**, acknowledging their sin **and believe** in Jesus for forgiveness.

Now, by God's undeserved love through the Holy Spirit's miracle of faith, we are believing children of God who love Him and want to follow His ways. But inside of us there remains a sinful nature that wants to act like the worst we see in the sons in Jesus' parable. So let me ask: **Which son are You?**

If you take God at His Word, I think you'll find what I see in myself: a little bit of both these **sons**.

The first son told his Father: **I will not!** Kind of like a kid talking back to mom and dad. Something I'm pretty sure we've all done. And since God tells us to honor our parents and others in authority, each time we've defiantly said **I will not** to mom or dad, or our teacher or the laws of the land, then we were also saying **I will not** to God, our Father in heaven.

Every time we've longed for what God forbids, every time we've left the good God commands undone, it's the same as we though we said it right to the Lord's face: **I will not**.

And how many times have we been like the second son, saying the right things, but not actually doing them.

It happens when we tell our children how important God's Word and prayer are, but then we don't show we mean what we say with our actions by letting them see us pray and read our Bibles.

We rightly speak of Grace alone, that we are only saved because of God's undeserved love. But then a little part of us starts to look down on the openly wicked people of the world and we start to think that maybe we don't need God's grace quite as much as *some* people do.

We speak of the need to reach the lost, to share the Word of God with others, but then we don't actually speak up to that friend or family member or spend time in prayer for mission work in all its forms. We sing of kindness and compassion in worship, but go home to yell at our spouse or work to annoy that person who gets on our nerves...

You see it now right? **Which son are you?** We are all the son who needs to repent. We are still sinful

people who need a Savior. We need a total change of heart and mind and life. We are in desperate need of a complete rescue from sin and the death and hell it deserves. We are the son who doesn't deserve to be called God's child.

And yet we are His children! Because God himself gives us the complete rescue we need from sin. The total change of heart and life is exactly what God Himself provides for us.

He gives it to us freely because of the third Son in our reading. You know, Jesus, the Son who spoke the words of our Gospel. The Son of God, true God from all eternity, whose love for us was so great He became the Son of Mary, our true human brother to step into our place.

Jesus was the perfect Child of God none of us have ever been. Jesus always *said* and *did* the right thing. His heart, His words, His actions all lived up to the perfection God requires. He honored and obeyed His mother Mary, his step-father Joseph, the laws of the land, *and* His Father in heaven perfectly. Jesus didn't just preach about faith filled obedience, He always lived it.

Jesus had no sin to repent of, no disobedience to confess, no reason to be treated as anything but the perfect Child of God. And yet for our sake Jesus was forsaken by His Father on the cross, so that as He suffered the depths of hell and death He would take away the sin of the world—the sin of every time we said **I will not** and every time we said **I will, but then didn't**.

When He rose from the dead on Easter morning, as the proof of our forgiveness, Jesus spoke these amazing words: **I am returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.** Because of our sin, we had no right to call God our Father. But on account of Jesus forgiving our sin, God is indeed our Dear Father who gives us the inheritance of His heavenly mansions!

**Which son are you?** Listen to how the book of Galatians answers that question for you: **You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.**

In the Word and water of baptism God took the obedience and the forgiveness of Jesus the perfect Son



and wrapped you up with it, so now you appear in God's eyes as the third Son in our reading: you look like Jesus, the perfect Son of the Father in heaven!

**Which son are you?** You are God's dearly loved child for Jesus' sake. And that truth we keep returning to as we confess our sins and cling to Jesus is what the Spirit uses to empower us to not just, but also live: **I will, Father. Amen.**

*You were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light. Amen.*