

Pentecost XX  
September 27-28, 2008

***“The Faith to Follow”***

Text: Matthew 21:23-32

There is an old story of a soldier who approached a busy judge with a letter. At first the judge did not seem inclined to pay much attention the letter, but when he opened it, the first line changed his whole attitude. It was from his own son and read:

“Dear Father: The bearer is a soldier discharged from the hospital, and he is going home to die; help him in any way you can for my sake.”

The judge said to a friend later: “I took that soldier to my heart for Charlie’s sake. I clothed him in Charlie’s clothes; I let him sleep in Charlie’s bed, and supplied him with every comfort for Charlie’s sake.”

Like the two sons in our parable, we are disobedient to our Father. As sinners, there is no way for us to follow Him on our own. He has made the way possible for us in His Son, Jesus Christ. We therefore can no longer depend upon ourselves but only in Christ because of what He has done for us as we are given and called to—

**THE FAITH TO FOLLOW**

- I. We Are Sinners**
- II. God guides us in His way of life**
- III. God ‘s Grace Changes Us**

## I.

Our Text takes place during the Tuesday of Holy Week. The Pharisees had asked Jesus to tell them the authority behind His miracles, when he asked them a question in response, they could not answer Him. They feared both His response and the response of the people. In order to illustrate their unbelief he tells this parable.

The two sons were both asked by their father to work in his vineyard. Please notice that both of the sons were wrong in their responses. The first refused, the second agreed but never followed through. The difference is that the first changed his mind, he repented of his action and went to work in the vineyard of his father.

As we examine these two sons, we can see a lot of us in both of them. We know what God wants us to do and what is right according to His word. How often don't we sin against Him by refusing to live as He would have us to live? St. Paul summarizes this condition as he says, "*For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing.*" (Romans 7:19)

Then of course there are those times when we are much like the second son, when we claim allegiance to God or willingness to follow Him and do not. This was the plight of the Pharisees and their followers of all ages. God's response to this kind of faith is- "*For I desire mercy and not sacrifice, an acknowledgment of God rather than burnt offerings.*" (Hosea 6:6) While we may put on a good impression for others to see, God knows our heart, it is that which he desires and which He directs.

## II.

Christian faith responds in the way of the first son. Even though the Holy Spirit dwells within us, we sometimes are very rebellious. Again St. Paul reminds us, *“And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ, God forgave you.”* (Ephesians 4:30-32)

After that first son came to his senses, he realized what he had done. He wanted to do the will of his father. Perhaps in a busy moment, in a time of self interest, in anticipation of the drudgery of the work—for any number of possible reasons, he refused. When he reconsidered, he was glad to do the work.

In order to illustrate this, Jesus points to the ministry of John the Baptist. John showed the people the way of God’s righteousness. It called them to repent and believe and many did. Jesus points out the examples of the tax collectors and prostitutes. They were great sinners, the outcasts of society. When they heard John’s message they repented! Jesus said on another occasion: *“It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but those who are sick... For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.”* (Matthew 9:12,13)

Because we are all sinners, God calls us to repentance. But He offers us full forgiveness in our Savior Jesus Christ and He changes our way of life from rebellion to following.

### III.

Jesus called the Pharisees to account because they failed to see what God required and the way He made it possible for them to follow Him. When they saw the change in the tax collectors and prostitutes, they were unmoved by that conversion and change. They did not repent and believe!

What a lesson there is for you and me in this parable. We cannot earn God favor by what we do. He comes to us because he knows we cannot. A pilot was once struck by temporary blindness in flight. In panic he called the control tower. They radioed back, “*Follow my instructions implicitly.*”

After keeping the blinded pilot circling the field until the whole field was cleared and an ambulance had arrived, the control tower radioed: *Now lose altitude, now bank sharply, you’re coming onto the field now.*”

The pilot brought his plane to a perfect landing, was saved, and later his sight returned. We too are blinded by our sin, but God has come to us and given us his vision. As we have that vision, we trust in Him for all of our providing. In Jesus Christ, He has provided us with the greatest gift of all our eternal salvation. He gives us the desire to follow Him and do His work and makes the way possible for us.

In my devotional reading the other day, I came across the thought which said that God assumes the responsibility of keeping us in a right relationship with Him. As he does this we have *The Faith to Follow*. Amen.