



SAINT LUKE'S

"TODAY"

THE 17TH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST
YEAR A

EZEKIEL 18:1-4, 25-32

PSALM 25:1-18

PHILIPPIANS 2:1-13

MATTHEW 21:23-32

A SERMON BY THE REV. CAROLINE STACEY

OCTOBER 1, 2017

This is stewardship Sunday but I am not going to talk much about money. Instead let's reflect on this story of two sons. It is a parable about stewardship because all our choices in life are about stewardship. This story is about honoring commitments. It is about integrity: stewardship of our word, stewardship of our time, stewardship of our promises.

The two sons in today's gospel have opposite responses. One says No to his father's command and then changes his decision to Yes. Very few of us always get it right the first time. For most of us, the road to maturity and self-knowledge and integrity is bumpy. The word of grace here is this: the Son who says No at first but then goes, gets there in the end. And that counts with Jesus. The other son says Yes but does not follow through. And that is where Jesus places the leaders of his own people. The chief priests and the elders, Jesus says, will enter the kingdom of heaven *after* the very people they most despise - the prostitutes and the tax collectors.

Perhaps the son who says Yes but doesn't go - maybe he has good reasons. Maybe he means - I have to do other things today, but I will go tomorrow instead. There are always all kinds of reasons not to go today. We always have things on our To Do list. This parable is about what we choose today. How often do we put off commitments that we need to honor? One day....I'm going to get around to ...praying more, being more generous towards those in need, volunteering more, treating my loved ones better, not just giving them the leftovers of my energy, time

and love after work. One day, I am going to really live my true calling. One day, I am going to T.S. Eliot writes:

*“Between the idea/ And the reality
Between the motion/ And the act
Falls the Shadow
Between the conception/And the creation
Between the emotion/And the response
Falls the Shadow¹*

The shadow is the gap which separates what we say from what we actually do. We gaze across the gap at all our good intentions strewn as far as the eye can see. You may recall that The Letter of James also speaks of a shadow. James says about God “*in [Him]there is no shadow or variation due to change [or: turning]*”². God is only light, with no shadow. In God there is no gap between the idea and the reality, the past, present and future, no gap between the intention and the act. In Jesus, we see similar wholeness and integrity. No shadow due to turning. It is one of the marks of his divinity.

This parable of two sons turns out not to be about working in a vineyard but about the kingdom of heaven. Jesus speaks in the present tense. *The tax collectors and the prostitutes **are going** into the kingdom of heaven ahead of you. Not will go but **Are going** - today.* For Jesus, whether or not we are living in the kingdom of heaven is about what we do today, and much less about what we believe about the future.³ The

¹ T.S. Eliot: The Hollow Men

² James 1:17

³ Cf. many other examples of Jesus using the present tense of the Kingdom: The kingdom of heaven is like... Mt. 13:44,45,47; The kingdom of heaven is among you: Lk.17:21

kingdom of heaven is not what we did yesterday or what we plan for tomorrow. As we live today, so we choose the kingdom or not.

It is so easy for us to live from the past or for the future and not really live today at all. (“Life is what happens when we are making other plans”)⁴. It is hard to let *today* - this moment - really break through. We see the present through the eyes of what the past teaches us to expect. This person behaves as we expect because we look at them and think we understand and know them, and so that pattern governs what we see. Jesus says: God has things for you to see, experience, say Yes to and do that are specific to this day. This is your daily bread from heaven - your gift from God - *today*. God is sending you into the vineyard *today*. Today has a shelf life. Like the manna from heaven that the Israelites eat in the wilderness⁵, today will expire. Are you really living it or are you planning for the future all day? Or are you worried about yesterday all day today?

Jesus invites us to catch up to our commitments and vows today. Not only because tomorrow may not be given to us, but even more because the kingdom of heaven is now.

I started by noting that this is Stewardship Sunday. Your pledges matter financially and spiritually. Financially, your pledges keep the lights on while planning for new programs within and beyond the parish. If anyone thinks that because we have these new income streams from leases and development we don't need your pledges, you would be 100% wrong. We will have to be very, very careful and disciplined

⁴ Allen Saunders

⁵ Exodus 16

stewards if we are to fulfil our dreams of service beyond ourselves. These realities are what your vestry is examining this Fall. Your stewardship committee is seeking 100% participation in pledging this year. Sometimes stewardship sermons are jokingly called “The Sermon on the Amount”. I think of it as “The Sermon on the Commitment”. Your pledges matter spiritually. If St. Luke’s is our spiritual home, then for our own spiritual health we need to participate by pledging, and pledge as close to the 10% biblical tithe as we are prayerfully able. When we pledge we say Yes to living in the kingdom of God and mean it, and we honor our duty as Christians outlined in the catechism to *work, pray and give for the spread of the kingdom of God...* Today.

AMEN

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