

9/27/26
18th Sunday after Pentecost
For Group Meetings from September 20th – September 26th

OUR MISSION: As a missional congregation we *celebrate* Christ's presence, *invite* people into a growing relationship with Jesus, and *equip* them to *serve* in a broken world.

Prayer of the Day: God of love, giver of life, you know our frailties and failings. Give us your grace to overcome them, keep us from those things that harm us, and guide us in the way of salvation, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. **Amen.**

BIBLICAL EQUIPPING TOGETHER:

Share: How did last week's scripture (Matthew 20:1-16) work in your life this week?

Mission:

- What was most satisfying about your ministry last week?
- Where do you see God at work?
- How did you participate in God's missional activity?
- How did inviting go last Sunday?

Hear: Matthew 21:23-32

Explore Questions: (Use these or develop your own.)

1. Where does this conversation take place and who approaches Jesus?
2. Why do the religious leaders have such difficulty answering Jesus?
3. What does each son eventually do?

Connect Questions: (Use these or develop your own.)

1. Are you more likely to make a quick commitment or take time before saying yes? How has that tendency affected you?
2. Have you ever been surprised by where you encountered God?
3. Has someone ever changed in a way that caused you to rethink who they were?

Memorize this verse: "For John came to you in the way of righteousness and you did not believe him, but the tax-collectors and the prostitutes believed him; and even after you saw it, you did not change your minds and believe him." (John 21:32) Share a time you initially resisted something and later realized you needed to change course.

BIBLICAL EQUIPPING APART:

Obey: During this week follow through on your intentions.

Meditate: Meditate on Psalm 25:1-9. How does this speak into your life?

Reflect: What have I learned in my week of living with this text? What can I share with my group when we next meet?

Notes for ChristCare leaders:

Sometimes, when I'm working with a passage, I like to clarify what I know and what I don't know about what's going on. I'll start with those things we don't know in regards to the parable. We don't know if this behavior was typical of the sons or extraordinary. We don't know what interaction or conversation the sons may have had with each other (or with their father) after their initial response. We don't know what may have prevented or enticed either of the sons to act in opposition to their earlier statements. And we don't even know exactly why Jesus told this parable or Matthew shared it. So, what do we know? Well, mainly that the son who said he'd show up and work did not. And the son who at first refused changed his mind and did. We also know that most of those listening would probably agree with the saying that "actions speak louder than words" and therefore believe that the first son, despite his abrupt, if not somewhat obnoxious, refusal of his father's command is the one who "did the will of his father." And we know that Jesus links this parable to the response of the tax collectors and prostitutes (shorthand for those considered beyond the pale of respectable society) to the good news of the coming kingdom. I find this to be a valuable exercise because a lot of what we don't know has to do with motivation and circumstances, and this is true not only of our interaction with these characters but also of our regular interactions with one another.

We may guess and we may make assumptions and judgments, but ultimately, we don't know the whole story. And that should introduce a little bit of caution, if not humility, in our judgments, again about these characters but even more about one another. The general assumption about this parable and its placement at this part of Matthew's Gospel is that it serves both to highlight the heightened tension between Jesus and the religious authorities of this day and to build the case against those same religious leaders for their failure. Their failure to answer Jesus' question about John's authority, their failure to accept his message, and their failure to recognize Jesus' as God's promised Messiah. Perhaps this is the case. Perhaps. But I wonder if this parable does not also offer a word of surprise and hope. Indeed, perhaps many words of surprise and hope.

Here are just a few. I hear in this parable the surprising possibility of hope that someone who has refused to listen to God may yet change their mind. Hope that it's never too late to respond to the grace of the Gospel. Hope that one's past actions or current status do not determine one's future. Hope that even those whom good folk have decided are beyond the pale of decent society are never, ever beyond the reach of God. If this is so, then perhaps this text can remind us that no matter what may have happened in the past, God is eager to meet us in the present and offer us an open future. It is not too late. God is here, inviting each of us into the kingdom that not only lives out in front of us but has the capacity to shape our every moment from this one forth.

Thanks be to God,

Pastor Thadd (tbook@desertcross.org)

Traditional version:

Our Father who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come,
thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
As we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us
from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power,
And the glory, forever and ever. Amen

Contemporary version:

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name, your kingdom come,
your will be done on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins as we forgive those
Who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial
And deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the
power, and the glory are yours,
Now and forever. Amen