

Text: Matthew 21:28-32. HCSB 19th Sunday after Pentecost. **October 15, 2017.**

Grace and peace are yours through Jesus our Savior. Amen.

What do you think? I'm going to tell you a little story and you tell me what you think. Ok? Maybe the story will sound familiar, but still, humor me and answer this question, "What do you think?" A man had two sons and I really want you to think about this, "Which son are you?" Which son are you? The man goes to the first son and says, "Work in the vineyard today." Now a vineyard was hard work. Probably on a steep and rocky hillside. Probably going to be hot. Probably no shade. Probably 12 hour work day, sun up to sun down. Any takers? Anybody want to work? Well, neither did this first son. At least he was honest. I don't want to! I don't want to! No way! I don't want to. He's like a whiny, two year old who was just asked to go to the back of the line. I don't want to! It's my turn to be in front. I don't want to. I'm going to be angry forever! Get the picture? What do you think? Are you this son? But later he changed his mind and he went. Later he was sorry for his whining. He was sad he had let his father down. So later he changed his mind. And he went. Are you this son? Or are you the other son? Same request. Same command. Go, work in the vineyard today. Oh and this guy, he is right on the ball, "I will, sir! Of course, sir! Anything you say, sir! Can I start right now and work some overtime, sir!" But if you look a little closer, his words aren't quite as good as they sound. He literally said, "I, me, I will go. I myself." He puts an emphasis on himself. He's thinking about himself. And when it came time to work, he was especially thinking about himself. And he didn't go. Not a chance. What do you think?

This number two son, he's a lot like Eddie Haskell from the old-time TV show *Leave it to Beaver*. Even if you haven't seen it, you'll be able to tell me what you think about Eddie Haskell. Eddie was a teenage boy and when parents were around, Eddie was the nicest young man. "Yes, Mrs. Cleaver. Why, that pie sure smells delicious, Mrs. Cleaver. That's a swell suit you have on there, Mr. Cleaver." But when the parents were gone, Eddie was causing trouble, stirring up trouble. Just like this son who said, "I will, sir!" But then he didn't go. What do you think? Hypocrite? Phony? Two-faced? This son was definitely number two.

Well, what do you think? Which son did his father's will? Which son did his father's will, not talked about it or sounded good. Who actually did it? Well, the answer is so obvious it's embarrassing. Of course it was the first son, who at first said, "I don't want to," but then changed his mind and went. Why even ask the question? Anyone could figure it out!

Why ask the question? What's the point? Jesus wanted his hearers to ask themselves, "Which son am I?" It's good if we all ask ourselves, if you ask yourself, "Which son am I?" Which son are you? You see, the people that Jesus was talking to were the chief priests and the elders of the people. They were the pictures of the number two son. They looked so good. They sounded so good. They prayed on the street corners, for all to hear and only so all would hear. They didn't care about God. They wore religious clothing, so all would see. But it was all an outward show. They thought, "I will, sir," was enough. Today we'd call them, self-righteous, hypocrites, fake, two-faced. They never admitted their sin, so they never realized their need for a Savior. They thought by saying and showing the right things, they were right with God.

But oh, were they sadly mistaken. Did you catch that in Jesus' explanation? The tax collectors and

prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God before you! Wait! What? The tax collectors and prostitutes!? Ah! How can this be? Interesting that tax collectors comes before prostitutes. Shows you a little what people thought about tax collectors back then. If you wanted to start a list of terrible sinners, you started with tax collectors. The tax collectors and prostitutes? What's going on? How could they be first in line for anything? Well, the tax collectors and prostitutes knew they were first in the line of sinners, so they wanted to be first in the line to be forgiven. We meet men in the Bible like Matthew, his name sound familiar? And Zaccheus, yes the short guy who climbed a tree to see the Savior. And the nameless prostitute who had a reputation all over town. She cried at Jesus' feet and poured perfume on Jesus to show her love that Jesus forgave her. See, if you want to be first in line for forgiveness, you need to realize you are first in line for sin. The chief priests and elders to whom this story was addressed didn't admit they had sin, so they didn't see the need for forgiveness, for a Savior. They hated the tax collectors and prostitutes. They refused to get in line behind them. Even when it was a line to heaven. Because who could possibly imagine that tax collectors and prostitutes would be in a line going anywhere other than hell?

Even after God sent John. Some might know him as John the Baptist. He came a few months before Jesus, telling people the way to be right with God. That's the way of righteousness that is spoken of here. The way to be right with God is to admit your sin, be sad over your sin, like the first son, believe in Jesus and then let that faith spur you on to the right actions, to show you are sorry for your sins by doing the father's will. But if you don't admit your sin, there's nothing to be sorry for, there's nothing to be sad about, there's no need to place your faith in anyone beside yourself, and there's no need to change your mind, or your actions. It's so sad. These chief priests and elders, they rejected John and so they rejected Jesus. They rejected the only way to be right with God.

But enough about them. Who cares about people 2000 years ago? What about you? What do you think? Which son are you? Did you see yourself in the whiny two year old? I don't want to! When the alarm went off this morning, did you think, "I don't want to go!"? When you walk past the Bible at home, do you think, "I don't want to read!"? Could you even find the Bible at home? I don't want to! It's buried too deep. I don't want to give up sleep. I don't want to give up my sports, my tv, my money. I don't want to!

But maybe that's not you. I mean, you came today, right? Yes, sir! And I, myself, am far better than all those who didn't, sir. Pastor, I hope you're keeping track. I'm sure God is. And you know, as for those people who aren't here, I don't really want to be with them anyway. They can't possibly be as good as I am, because hey, they aren't here, not like me. Which son are you? I think the sad truth is that I'm a mix of the two. And it's not a mix of the best parts. It's a mix of the worst.

I and me and my, that's not the way to be right with God. Putting on a big show, that's not the way. Listening to the voice of, "I don't want to"? That's not the way either. Only Jesus is the way. First Jesus has to bring us to realize our sin. First Jesus has to get us to admit our sin. Jesus, I'm a poor, miserable sinner! Jesus, I'm no better than a tax collector and I'm just as bad as a prostitute. They should be in line ahead of me! Not in the line for sinners. I should be first in that line. When Jesus brings you to see, "I'm the first son in the sin line, I'm the first person in the sin line," then Jesus can put you first in the cross line. First in line for his forgiveness, won on the cross, first in line for the heaven, he handed you on the cross, first in line for the eternal life he signed with his blood, sealed with his empty tomb, delivers in water and wine. Son, take heart. Son, your sins are forgiven. Son, see my hands, my feet. I love you. Son,

believe in me. Son, I changed your mind about sin. I made you sad about it. Son, I changed your mind about faith. Don't have faith in yourself. Believe in me! Daughter, your mansion in heaven is all ready. I've just got a few things for you to do here on earth before you live in that mansion for all eternity. What do you think? What if we were not the whiny first son, "I don't want to!"? What if we were not the phony number two son, "I will, sir!"? What if we were not a third son, mix of the whiny and the phony? What if? We were a fourth son who said, "I will, sir," and he went? What do you think? What if we said, "I want to," and went? What do you think? Wouldn't that be the son to be? Who said, "I want to be in God's house," and happily was? A son who said, "I want to eat God's Word up, every day," and actually ate it up? What about being the son whom Jesus placed first in line for heaven, and for Jesus, all of us can be first? That's the son I want to be! That's the child you are, baptized child of God. That's the son you are. Amen.