

Week 25
March 8, 2009

Two Very Different Sons
Matthew 21:28-32

1. READ Matthew 21:28-32
2. The religious authorities ask Jesus, “By whose authority do you do these things?” Jesus answers a question with a question. Why didn’t Jesus simply answer them?
3. Why did Jesus bring up John the Baptist? Is he just trying to trap them? Or is there something from the life and message of John that they were supposed to learn?
4. The first son in Jesus’ parable says “no” to his father, but then turns around and shows up to do his father’s bidding. Why might this have happened?
5. Can you think of anything you once said “no” to, and then changed your mind for the better? Share some stories and examples.

6. The second son says “yes” but then doesn’t show up. Can you think of a time when you said “yes” but couldn’t bring yourself to follow through? What was happening? What were the outcomes?

7. In some cultures, it is shameful to say “no” to an authority figure, and less shameful to say “yes” and then not show up. In some “honor” or “face” based cultures, being true to your word is less honorable than “saving face” and helping others do so. Why is this so foreign to most of us?

8. In our culture, we honor the person who says “no” and means “no,” and we honor the person who says “yes” and means “yes.” Why would Jesus lift up those who say “no” but their actions come around and become a “yes?”

9. Jesus is clearly coming after religious people who say the right things but don’t do the right things. “White washed tombs.” “Blind guides.” “Do what they say, but don’t do what they do.” (Matthew 23) Why is Jesus so bothered by this kind of hypocrisy? It’s the one thing that really gets him riled up!

10. Jesus again speaks kindly of “tax collectors and prostitutes” who respond to the message of John the Baptist (“Repent! The Kingdom is near.”) Why is Jesus so

tender to these “big” sinners?

11. Some say that “any sin is big sin. All sin is the same.” How can this be? Aren’t some sins more consequential than others? However stiff and rigid, aren’t we better off in the company of religious people who don’t “sin big” than in the company of irreligious people who do? Jesus seems to prefer the latter? How? Why?

12. Are you someone who tends to express your faith more by words or more by actions? How do you feel about your answer to that question?

For the hardcore group:

*Before the Great Reformation (Luther, Calvin, Zwingli and others), the Church too often hyper-extended the notion of **doing** as a means of earning God’s favor. The Reformation refocused the eye of most Christians on the critical nature of grace and faith, rather than works.*

Some suggest that in 20th century Christianity evangelicals hyper-extended “salvation by grace through faith” to the point where we lost the call to be doers. And “liberal Christians” lost the message of the gospel but engaged in social causes. Now, there seems to be a synthesis in the church between faith and good works, evangelism and social betterment, and being with doing.

For example, prominent evangelical Christian leaders are now key figures in the global fight against poverty, hunger, AIDS and various diseases and human dilemmas. While some of this has always been true, now we are seeing signs of this synthesis everywhere.

How do you see this and how do you react to it? Is this a good thing? Any cautions or concerns? Any hoorays or hurrahs?