

## **The Obedient Son**

### **Farewell Sermon**

**Fourth in a Series of Sermons, “Connecting People to Jesus”**

**September 30 and October 1, 2023**

***Matthew 21: 28-32 - What do you think? A man had two sons. And he went to the first and said, ‘Son, go and work in the vineyard today.’ And he answered, ‘I will not,’ but afterward he changed his mind and went. And he went to the other son and said the same. And he answered, ‘I go, sir,’ but did not go. Which of the two did the will of his father?” They said, “The first.” Jesus said to them “Truly, I say to you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes go into the kingdom of God before you.”***

***Ezekiel 18:30 - Repent and turn from all your transgressions, lest iniquity be your ruin. Cast away from you all the transgressions that you have committed and make yourselves a new heart and a new spirit!***

Dear Friends in Christ,

There’s a lot of ways to say that someone doesn’t really have their act together. I printed off 100 of them this past week. But I’m sharing with you only 10. Or so.

Not the brightest star in the sky / The lights are on but no one’s home / A few cards short of a full deck. / A few sausages short of a BBQ. / A few fries short of a Happy Meal. / The elevator doesn’t go all the way to the top floor./ The wheel is spinning but the hamster is dead / A few colors short of a rainbow / Only has one oar in the water / The gates are down and the lights are flashing, but the train isn't coming.

And the one that gets us to our sermon series theme, “There seems to be a loose connection.” Connecting People to Jesus.

- Three weeks ago, Jesus the Passionate Lover of our souls.
- Two weeks ago, Jesus the Merciful King
- Last week, Jesus the Generous Master
- Today, Jesus the Obedient Son

I said it last week, and I’ll say it again. I treasure every single relationship, I value every connection God has permitted us to form here at Faith Lutheran these past 14 months. But even more important than the connections pastors and people may form over the months and years is the relationship we have with our Savior.

***Connecting People to Jesus.*** In today’s parable, God is represented by the father who has two sons. The two sons represent two groups in Israel. The first son

corresponds to the penitent tax collectors and prostitutes, and the second is representative of the Pharisees and teachers of the law who were refusing to heed the preaching of John the Baptist, refusing to repent of their sins, refusing to believe in Jesus as the Messiah.

***Please notice two truths about the father's invitation to be his sons and to be part of the family business.***

***Truth #1*** is that it is the father who went to the sons and not the other way around. God always takes the initiative in His relationship with us. What we say and do is always a response to what God has already said and done.

***Truth #2*** is that there is a note of urgency in the father's words, "Son, go and work today." This is an echo of the warning we find throughout Scripture to those of us who are putting off until tomorrow what needs to be done today. Dear friends, today and not tomorrow is the day to get serious about hearing God's Word and doing His will. To get serious about repenting and believing and living our faith in such a way that others are attracted to Jesus.

***Two lessons we would learn about Jesus, the perfectly obedient Son of God.***

***First, Jesus is that Obedient Son Who disturbs those satisfied with the status quo.***

A story is told about a pastor who was preaching his sermon one day. Going on and on and on, as certain preachers do. At a certain point, a baby began to be restless, and then to fuss in a way that was distracting, and then a full blown session of crying and carrying on. Finally the young mom got up to take her child to the nursery. As she did so, the minister stopped his sermon and called out to her, "Your baby is not disturbing me." At which point she turned around and called back, "Well maybe not, but you sure are disturbing him."

Today's parable is one of many of our Lord's parables in which Jesus is disturbing the religious leaders of His day, aka, the Pharisees, the scribes, the chief priests, the elders, Sanhedrin, the professors, the scholarly. The context of today's parable is Holy Week. Jesus had triumphantly entered Jerusalem, riding on a donkey, and had accepted the accolades of the crowd acknowledging Him as the Son of David who could set them free. Early that week, Jesus had chased the moneychangers from the temple area, He overturned their tables, disrupted their profits, and raged against their turning His Father's house into a den of robbers.

Generally speaking, He was doing what He had done for three years - He was disrupting the status quo. He was healing folks that nobody else could heal. He was telling the winds when to stop blowing and the waves when they should stop roaring. He was doing miracles in such a way that the crowds were attracted by the thousands. Perhaps the worst disruption was that He was forgiving the sins of messed up people as if He were God Himself.

The Pharisees asked Jesus by what authority he was doing these things. Jesus answered their question with three of his own. He said, "I'll answer your question if you can tell me where John's baptism came from. Was it from heaven, or was it from men?"

The Pharisees knew they were in a lose/lose situation. If they answered that John's baptism was from heaven, Jesus would reply, "Well then, why didn't you believe him?" If they answered that it was from man, they knew the people would rise up against them. And so they answered the same way the average teenage boy will answer after doing something stupid and being asked why they did it. "I don't know."

One last time as your pastor, I wish to connect you to Jesus, the disrupter of those who are satisfied with the status quo.

One last time I challenge you today to look in the mirror and ask yourself good questions. Questions like

- Is my connection to Christ loose and occasional and haphazard? Or is it tight and regular and intentional?
- Do I have my act together, spiritually speaking? Or have I fallen into the camp of the Pharisees who were certain that their good behavior would gain them the favor of Almighty God?
- Do I regularly put myself in a position where the Holy Spirit can be my Teacher, my Counselor, and my Encourager? Or have I stumbled into a lukewarm brand of Christianity which is all words, but not much action.

This is what Jesus said to the religious leaders of His day, the folks who wanted desperately to maintain the status quo, **"Truly, I say to you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes go into the kingdom of God before you."**

Which is exactly what Jesus meant at the end of last Sunday's parable, "So the last will be first, and the first last."

Which is good news for any of us here today who are willing to be numbered with the last, aka the tax collectors and the prostitutes, aka those who were accepting

John the Baptist's message of repentance. Which brings us to the second truth we want to learn about Jesus today.

***Secondly, Jesus is that Obedient Son Who welcomes the broken hearted.***

In contrast to the first son who says he won't work and then does, and the second son who promises to work and then doesn't, Jesus is that obedient Son who perfectly submitted to His Father's will. His Father asked Him to give up the riches of heaven and accept the poverty of this earth, and He did. His Father asked Him to take on the form of a servant and be born of a woman, and He did. His Father insisted that He suffer all that He was appointed to suffer, and He did. His Father gave Him a full cup of a righteous God's wrath to drink, and He drank it. No doubt with tears in His divine eyes, the Father demanded that His Son endure being slapped and spit upon, that He be whipped, beaten, and tortured, that He be crowned with thorns, ridiculed as an imposter, pierced with a sword, and crucified as a common criminal until He was dead and buried, and He endured.

Jesus is that Obedient Son who said that He would go and do His Father's business, and He did. It's at the cross, where our Lord's actions speak even louder than His Words. It's at the cross, where we see most clearly how deep is the Father's love for us.

And so it's to the cross where I invite you to come with me one more time on this 18th Sunday after Pentecost. Come to the foot of the cross with every one of your broken hearts, and know that you're welcome here. A broken and a contrite heart, our God will never despise.

One last time, come with me to the Old Testament lesson of the day, where Ezekiel promises that where there is a sincere repentance, God will work inside of you a new heart and a new spirit.

Come with me to the Epistle Lesson of the day, where Paul invites us to have the mindset of Christ. A mindset that stayed humble and was obedient to the point of death on a cross. A mindset that spends its days confessing Jesus as Lord and doing God's will without grumbling or questioning. A mindset that holds fast to the Word of God and shines its Gospel light in such a way that God gets the glory.

Come with me to the Gospel lesson appointed for today, where those who are sorry for their sins are welcomed into the very presence of God. A God whose love for us is patient and kind and does not keep a record of wrongs.

Three takeaways, in closing this morning.

Takeaway #1 is that the genius of Christianity is that it consists of a whole lifetime of fresh starts. Which reminds me of one of my favorite prayers, “O God of second chances and new beginnings, here I am again.”

Takeaway #2 is a wish that I’ve stated before, and today I say it again. If we could be famous for one thing here at Faith Lutheran, it would be that we would sincerely confess our sins to God and to one another every day. So that the grace of God might sweep over this sanctuary and out into our neighborhoods. So that the forgiveness of sins might be ruling in our hearts and in our marriages and in our families and in our circle of friends in such a way that others will be attracted to Christ and to His Church and to His Word.

Takeaway #3 is to keep in mind that we will have our bad days, our good days, and our really good days.

- On our bad days, we will be loosely connected to Christ. God’s Word will go in one of our ears and out the other. We will imagine that our own good behavior will make us acceptable in God's courtroom. Spiritually speaking, we will be a few watts short of a light bulb, not the quickest bunny in the forest, a few noodles short of chow mein, missing a few buttons on our remote control, battery not fully charged, not all the soldiers are marching in line.
- On our good days, our connections with Christ will be steady and strong. We will be those little children sitting on the lap of Jesus Himself. We will see ourselves as lost sheep who have been searched for, found, rescued, returned and rejoiced over. As weary and thirsty travelers welcomed into an all-inclusive resort where the beverages are ice cold, the prime rib steaks are done to perfection, and the baked potatoes are covered with more butter and bacon bits and cheddar cheese than you can imagine. As servants of a merciful king who has forgiven us millions of dollars of debt. As laborers in a vineyard where our master has treated us with an amazing generosity. As broken and messed up people who keep on crying out for help, and even as we cry out, help has already arrived.
- On our best days, we will be helping and befriending others in a way that helps them be connected to Christ. Our new and improved hearts will be from God and for others. We will be loving as we have been loved, forgiving as we have been forgiven, and serving as we have been served. In Jesus’ Name. Amen.