

Sermon
St. Mary Nanoose Bay
October 01, 2017
Matthew 21:23-32

When I went to Portugal this past July to go on pilgrimage with my husband Jim, around day 3 I started to have pain in my Achilles heel. So I added some special foot support to my hiking shoes. At first, I felt great. But after a couple of hours of walking, the back of one of my heels started to rub against the back of the shoe and I could feel the promise of a blister. I ignored the sensation for a while. It just felt like too much work to find a place to stop, take off my shoe and try and find a solution. So I kept walking. And I didn't want to slow Jim down and draw attention to myself. So I kept walking. Finally, I knew that if I didn't stop and tend to myself, I would pay for my negligence big time the next day. Once I decided to take care of the situation, amazingly a café appeared in the near distance. So we stopped for a café con leite and I rearranged my shoes, putting on a protective bandaid where the skin was red but not yet broken. Then we went on our way. That was as close as I got to a blister the whole trip.

It was a facilitator at a job search support group who used the term "soul blisters." What he was referring to was the soul-destroying wrench that happens when what a person does for work is in conflict with their values and passion. Soul blisters occur when your beliefs are in conflict with your actions. What you say and what you do are at odds. And soul blisters serve to wake you up to potentially painful

consequences if you don't adjust what you are doing. Soul blisters call us to be honest with ourselves and to live in integrity.

We could say that the parable Jesus tells in today's gospel reading is about soul blisters. Jesus tells a parable to the chief priests and elders in the hopes of waking them up – to alert them to the fact that their words and their actions are not in alignment.

In the story Jesus tells, when a father tells his first son to go to work in the vineyard; the son says, "I will not," but later changes his mind and goes and does as he was asked.

The second son, when told to go and work, says, "I go, sir," but does *not*, in fact, go do as he has promised.

So what is the point to the story?

At the beginning of today's gospel reading, the priests and community elders who have been trying to trap Jesus with tricky questions that Jesus can see through. He challenges their lack of integrity with a question in return, which they dare not answer because as it is meant to do, it will expose them. They are simply more concerned with how they appear to others, not in the truth.

So after the parable of the sons in the vineyard, he again asks a question. "Which one of the two (sons) did the will of his father?" It's obvious, the one who actually went and did what he was asked, the first son; the son who had initially said 'no.'

Their answer condemns them. And Jesus tells them so. "Truly I tell you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are going into the kingdom of God ahead of you." In other words, the ones we least expect. The ones that don't tow the line, don't live reputable lives that

look good to others, but the ones who, once exposed to the truth, once exposed to Jesus, turn their lives around and “delight in God’s will and walk in God’s ways to the glory of God’s name.”

The pious people, the chief priests and community elders lived lives according to the law, and when Jesus comes to fulfil the law, they reject him. Religion has made them blind to the truth. Their own limited ideas about God make them comfortable, but the Son of God does not – so they try to get rid of him. And they are not willing to exchange their certainty and sense of security, their status and power to open to the love of God, incarnate in Christ Jesus.

So Jesus’ way of questioning is one way of waking us up. We can ask *ourselves*, “Which son am I most like?” Do I use religion to protect myself, to elevate myself in relation to others? Or am I focused on Jesus’ presence in my life as He challenges me to walk my talk?

St. Francis, whose feast day is coming up, put it this way, “Preach the gospel always, use words only when absolutely necessary.”

It is so evident in this passage that following Jesus, and believing in God has nothing to do with how good we are. It’s no accident that the people Jesus refers to in his parable are prostitutes and tax collection. They are the outsiders; the ones judged by others. And yet, they are the ones who are able to see Jesus for who He is; and receive His forgiveness and love.

We need to remember this. We are not saved because we are good or pious or say the right things. We are saved because we recognize the gift given to us through the life, death and resurrection

of Jesus, and we say “Yes!” to God. We say “thank you!” to God. And our love and appreciation for God’s mercy compels us to walk with, and serve God.

Mostly in joking ways, but sometimes more seriously, people insinuate that I must be a special person, a saintly person to have been called to the priesthood.

I want to assure you that I am one of the prostitutes and tax collectors who bumped into Jesus along the road, had my eyes opened and my heart cleansed and I believed. And have been following and stumbling after him ever since. My work is not to convince God and others that I am worthy. My work is to continually work to stay open to God’s abundant mercy and grace, receive it, and pass it on. And to remind those around me that they are loved, forgiven and called to abundant life.

My calling to the priesthood is special and unique. As is everyone’s calling to serve in however they are called.

When we open our eyes and realize that we are truly loved and trusted to do the work we’ve been given, we might stop procrastinating and go out into the vineyard to do the work that is really more like joyful service; a way of saying “thank you” to God for the amazing gift of life and love.

Soul blisters. They may hurt. But they serve to wake us up to the amazing life we’ve been given.

Thanks be to God. *Amen.*