

### “But afterward...”

Our current sermon series, “**Kingdom Come**” flows out of *The Second Petition of the Lord’s Prayer*, which Dr. Martin Luther explains in The Small Catechism: “*The kingdom of God certainly comes by itself without our prayer, but we pray in this petition that it may come to us also.*”

That is my prayer as we focus on the Parable of the Two Sons recorded in the Gospel of St. Matthew. Two words illustrate for me the essence of what it means to experience personally the Kingdom of God. When the father asks the first son “*to go and work in the vineyard today,*” the response was, “*I will not...but afterward he changed his mind and went.*” The second son responded, “*I go, sir, but [afterward] did not go?*” (Matthew 21:28-30) The dialogue Jesus shares in this encounter raises a very personal question: “How will you; how will I respond when the Heavenly Father asks, welcomes and invites us to ‘*go and work in His vineyard [Kingdom] today?*’”

In one sense, it’s very difficult for me to relate to the two sons in today’s parable, because just as Pastor Puls shared last week, my father taught my older brother and me respect for authority and drummed into our heads the value of hard work! If my Daddy ever told us to “*go and work in the yard, go take out the trash, go weed the garden, or go do anything*” - we would never have dared to respond: “*I will not*” - nor would we have given him any lip, talking back, or copping an attitude!

Our Daddy, you see, had a “*black belt*” – and not in karate, but around his waist, and it only took a few licks a time or two to grace our behinds to teach us that “*Go and work*” meant you

*“got up and went!”* And if we ever responded like the second son in the Parable, *“I will, sir, but then did not go?”* Well, we were smarter than that!

But how many times, when it comes to life in the Kingdom of God, living as children of the Heavenly Father, has the opposite been true - guilty, like the sons in the parable of saying one thing, and then turning around and doing, or not doing, exactly the opposite? At best, we sinful human beings are consistently inconsistent, always struggling to find the proper relationship between what we say and what we do! We can all identify situations and circumstances when we made promises we didn't keep; when we were two-faced and disloyal, doing everything, as Paul writes to the Philippians, out of *“selfish ambition or vain conceit.”* (Philippians 2:3) *“I will not”* is often our cry! *“I will, but then we don't”* is often our contradiction! We stand with all the *“tax collectors”* and *“prostitutes”* ever mentioned in the Bible, crying out *“God, be merciful to me, a sinner!”* (Luke 18:13)

This is the reality Jesus addresses in today's Gospel when His *“authority is questioned by the chief priests and the elders of the people.”* (Matthew 21:22-27) Though they claimed to know God as their Father, their loveless actions and pious words were compromised by outward deeds which opposed the coming of His Kingdom! Though they prided themselves on pledging to *“serve and the Lord their God and obey Him,”* (Joshua 24:24) they were, in effect, the *“other son”* in the parable, called to work in the Father's vineyard, and said they would, *“but did not go!”* They actually rejected the *“way of righteousness”* (Matthew 21:32) proclaimed by John, ultimately contriving the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, King of Kings and Lord of Lords who was sent to be *“the Way, the Truth and the Life!”* (John 14:6) Jesus hammers them on their hypocrisy, telling it like it is, *“And*

*even when you saw it, you did not **afterward** change your minds and believe him.*” (Matthew 21:32)

We too can be like that sometimes, can't we, saved by God's grace through faith, our sins washed away by the redeeming love of Jesus, promising to serve Him until the end, yet our lips and lives betray us in thought, word and deed! Just like the second son in the parable; just like the chosen ones of Israel; our response to the Heavenly Father is often, *“I go sir, and then don't!” “I trust you Lord, and then don't!” I believe in your promises Heavenly Father, and then don't!”*

Here's where the phrase then, those two words related to the first son, become ever so personal and powerful: **“BUT AFTERWARD...he changed his mind and went.”** In other words, my friends, there is this spiritual thing in the Kingdom of God called *“grace!”* Call it *“change, repentance, conversion, seeing the light, or growing up in faith”* – *“whatever!”* But the pages of God's Holy Word are replete with examples of “daughters” and “sons” who's “NO” got turned into a “Yes!” Claiming the cleansing stream of Holy Baptism, ours is the potential to *“rise from sin and death to walk in the newness of life!”* (Romans 6:4) If God can take the contradiction of death and transform it into life through the resurrection victory of His Son Jesus Christ - our Brother - then surely He can lead us by the Holy Spirit to be God's faithful children, whose confession reads: *“I will not, **BUT AFTERWARD...they changed their minds and went!**”*

What a gem from Scripture today which speaks of forgiveness and love, reconciliation and hope! **“But afterward”** is a phrase which offers pardon and peace, possibility and potential to every person who has ever said or done the exact opposite of what they intended! Looking down at His children through His only begotten Son who did

everything intended to win our salvation – “*even humbling Himself and becoming obedient unto death, even death on a cross*” (Philippians 2:8) – that same Heavenly Father re-opens to us today the door of repentance and renewal and change, His grace revealed in two simple words: **"But Afterward!"**

Think about it, today we come to Him stained by sin and soiled within...**"But Afterward!"** Our deeds have not always matched our creed...**"But Afterward!"** Death and sorrow may temporarily take away our joy...**"But Afterward!"** Faith is challenged, life is tossed and torn; relationships rent asunder; and sometimes it's just so hard to go on and we wonder how we'll make it through...**"But Afterward!"** Caught in this climate of COVID and conflict; the circumstances of daily life seeming so overwhelming...**"But Afterward!"** Defeated on a cross; sealed in tomb; death apparently doing its dastardly deed...**"But Afterward..."** just three days later; Jesus lives and reigns, “*promising to be with us always even to the close of the age!*” (Matthew 28:20)

Dr. Martin Luther captures the essence of the **"But afterward"** life, explaining: “*How does God's kingdom come? God's kingdom comes when our heavenly Father gives us His Holy Spirit, so that by His grace we believe His holy Word and lead godly lives here in time and there in eternity.*” So, will you believe God's promises today and go out from this place to “*proclaim and live the Word and love of Christ*” - thankful for His grace, abounding in hope and steadfast love? Some will say “*We go sir, but afterward do not go.*” Others respond, “*We will not, but afterward changed their minds and went.*” **"BUT AFTERWARD...!"** May the Holy Spirit guide you in the journey! **Amen.**

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