

“Those Guys!”
The Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost
Eunice Koch - September 28, 2008

Exodus 17:1-7

Psalms 78:1-4, 12-16

Philippians 2:1-13

Matthew 21:23-32

THOSE GUYS!

Anybody here have two sons? Raise your hands. I do and I'm living with sometime examples of the gospel for today. Some of you could probably guess who is who.

But for those of you who don't know them Charlie is the “Sure, Mom” guy and Randy is “no way, Jose!”. Charlie's answer is “you mean you wanted it done TODAY?”. And Randy grunts and grumbles but does whatever – right away! He says he does it NOW so he won't forget.

I think I am a smarter parent than the father in the parable – I only assign a task to one son. If one says ‘no’, I don't ask the other. It just does not get done. I'm good at piling on the guilt.

The fellows in the gospel seem to be real charmers – the kind I'd rather not have around my house but I do -- and so do you, **even if you live alone**.

The truth is that sometimes they are both ME! Or as Pogo used to say, "We has met the enemy and he is us!"

And what of you and me? Sometimes we talk a great story like the second son and yet there's little or no action. And sometimes we are like the first son and "repent"

But we had better set the stage for this drama. Jesus is in Jerusalem teaching in the temple. It is during the last week of His earthly life. And the chief priests, the seminary ordained guys, challenge him – “by what authority--?” – who ordained YOU!

Jesus answers a question with a question as was common in that setting. But why does he bring up John the Baptist? Most of the ‘congregation’ regard John, the maverick “total-ministry” priest, as a prophet. If the priests answer the question about human or heavenly origin with ‘human’ they were afraid of the reaction of the crowd. If they answered ‘heaven’ then why hadn't they followed him – and Jesus? If they say heavenly for John the Baptist they are acknowledging that Jesus is the Messiah. It is a two-fer deal. And Jesus is an upstart peasant from Galilee, of all places.

In Luke's version of the story, they were afraid of being stoned. But I believe that they were afraid of losing face. Is that why *we* – cross that - *I* find it hard to admit that I am wrong? Repentance is more than a one-time “altar call” but an on-going process. It is an on-going **growth** process.

Going back to the parable of the man and his sons. Do we have second-son syndrome? Do we say yes to God on Sunday morning but:

Blow our temper before we get home? (No left turn signal, shaking of fist)
Talk negatively about someone with who we have just worshipped?
Laugh at a sexist/racist joke because everyone else is laughing? (And some of them are really clever.)

Yes, we have done that – plus
We fail to speak up and say that we are doing such and so because of our faith
We fail to love ourselves
We gossip

Yes, we are the second son. We say “yes” but don’t follow through. And God loves us anyway.

Then we are, at times, like the first son. We answer God with the grinding of teeth, the digging in of heels and self-pitying “martyrdom” and as much – if not more - grumbling that the followers of Moses in the wilderness, but eventually do what we said we would do. We are the people of:

What I want instead of what God wants
I’m right so therefore you are wrong
My way and my rules or no way

We are the people of “me first”. And God loves us anyway.

We repent. We change. Yes, we are the first son.

Now that is the start of sermon I intended to give. But then Sarah Palin was chosen as the Republicans' candidate for Vice-President. So now a shift in action to today's world and to the Epistle reading for today,

Paul, in the letter to the Philippians, tells us to “be in full accord and of one mind.” But we are Anglicans – this does not fit with our self image – or public image.

We have to realize that when we use phrases like the “communion of saints” or the “company of believers” we are often referring to folks who are NOT PEOPLE JUST LIKE US! That means that Pope Benedict XVI AND Sarah Palin AND the Prelates not at Lambeth AND those teaching that the Holocaust did not happen AND those teaching that Middle East violence is due to Israeli Jews who don't accept Jesus!" AND –AND – AND. – these are folks who are all "in the club "We HAS met the enemy and he IS us!" And Jesus has COMMANDED us to love our enemy!

So how **can** we “be in full accord and of one mind?” Paul’s answer is that we are to be like Jesus “who did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself .—“.

Other translations have the word “grasped” instead of “exploited.” Personally I like that better. Often it is the grasping or holding on to something – ideas, things, people, -- that choke – them and us, and do not leave room for change.

Katharine Jefferts Schori said something prior to Lambeth about that gathering being one of conversation. Conversation is not just stating our point of view but being open to HEARING different views. WE must be willing to admit that we don’t have all the answers – or even some of them. And then some of the answers we

have might just be wrong! Yes, I must be willing to listen to the other side of the story and even let go of a cherished idea if it is wrong.

Jesus emptied himself and became a servant, God at work in Him and in us, if we let Him. Are we willing to be servants to those with wildly different views? Can we love those Christians supporting candidates this election year that we could not vote for “in a million years?” It is easy if they are family members or friends of long standing. Then we lovingly agree to disagree. It is harder when it is a casual acquaintance – even harder when it is a professing Christian candidate on TV whom we feel is not telling the truth. But we are called to love that person. The bottom line, for me, is looking for at least one point on which we agree. Most often it is that we all confess that “Jesus is Lord!”

Many Christians have trouble deciding whether what we believe is more important or whether what we do is. It is the centuries old discussion of faith vs works. Today’s lessons teach us that what we believe **changes** who we are; and what we do naturally flows from that identity. We are called to follow Jesus. Jesus will help and lead us – we must follow - no excuses!