

## ***EIGHTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST***

***Matthew 21:28-32***

In the Gospel for today, Jesus says there was a father who had two sons. The father asked both to go out and work in the field.

One of them says “no” but later goes to the field and works. The other says “yes” but does not go at all. Jesus asked: “which son do you think pleased the father more, the one who said no, but then went, or the one who said yes, but then did nothing?” There are some things in life that we can’t really get to know unless we do them. For example: we can’t learn how to do the foxtrot by just reading an instruction book, if we really want to know how to do the Foxtrot then we have to actually do the dance.

However, reading a book is an important tool in learning. The Bible is the most important book for every Christian. But, the Christian faith is not just words in a book. We can read and hear those words day after day in our devotions, week after week in this church, but we only get to know what those words really mean when we put them into practice. What it boils down to this. Being a Christian is not as simple as agreeing with the teachings of the church that we find in the Bible and other literature about living the Christian life. Neither can you become a Christian by just listening to Scripture based preaching or taking part in discussions on being a Christian. In other words, becoming an active Christian is not as simple as reading religious literature about living the Christian life, to

which we give our approval.

Jesus didn't lay down a new system of beliefs and theology.

Other people have written down, in thick books, what the Christian Church teaches and believes. Jesus didn't write anything like this. He spoke God's message to all people, but more than that, he lived what he taught and preached. He not only spoke fine words about loving God and loving one another; he not only taught about forgiving, and caring for one another, or how to pray, he actually lived those words as he traveled from town to town healing, encouraging, forgiving.

The teachings of Jesus came to life as he carried out his daily ministry to others, as he gave his life out of love on Good Friday, as he rose again victorious from the grave on Easter Day.

Jesus didn't ask us simply to agree with him, but to *follow* him. That's where the rubber hits the road. It is the *doing* that really matters. The Christian faith is only known in how we live out our faith in our lives.

A devotion book may be interesting with lots of stories and illustrations. The author may be very good with words and explain the Bible in an informative and entertaining way. But the final test of all those words and the brilliance of the author is whether those words are performed in the daily lives of the reader. And that is where the difficulty rests. We are so much like that second son in Jesus' parable. We are polite, obliging and co-operative. We hear the words and say: "Yes, Lord, I would be so pleased to do as you ask", but we do very little, or nothing, about it.

I wonder how many times we have heard our reading today from Paul's letter to the Philippians. Too many to count I dare say.

We hear it, we give our approval, but we go home and forget that we ever heard it. In it Paul wants his readers, and that

includes us, to see that belonging to Jesus is not just a matter of agreeing with what Paul is saying, but that faith is a busy active doing thing. Be like Christ, forgiving, caring, encouraging, loving in every action. As God's chosen and loved people, we have been given a new life, a new confidence, a new power to live as one of God's people. Jesus changes people. He changes our values. He changes the way we regard others. He changes our attitudes.

We all know that our faith consists of more than words and agreeing with them. We know that our faith is one of getting up and doing, but we find it easier to be religious couch potatoes.

Be assured God will not let us be content with a couch potato kind of Christianity. You see our faith is not just something inside us, it's out the world getting very practical. Whether we are talking about caring for someone in need, showing kindness to someone who is experiencing one of life's tragedies, supporting someone who needs encouragement, or simply giving a friendly word, being a light that shines in the dark confusion of moral values, deciding to really make an effort, not just to say it's good to read the Bible and pray, but to actually set time aside and do it.

When we hear a sermon, we have received a message from God, and now it's up to us to turn the hearing into action. Wrestle with how to do it, argue with God about it, weep over it, be challenged by it, repent and change, or whatever it is that God is saying to us. And if we still don't know what to do, listen to God again (maybe we didn't get all of his message the first time), ask others and especially pray about it.

What it comes down to is this. Do we even care about what happens to other people? Are we willing to trust the God that dwells within us, and to show that his loving power by what we

say and do? Are we willing to show that the God we claim that is in us, really cares about others? That is the issue in all of today's scripture readings, from Moses showing and sharing the power of God that dwelt within him, to Jesus speaking about the authority by which he taught and healed and helped others, to St. Paul in his letter to the Philippians telling us what kind of attitude we should have. God is in us. We have the power. We have the spirit. We have the promises. We have the way and the truth and the life.

So what are we going to do with it? We start by caring for and loving those around us without regard for how little, or how much, others may think that they deserve that love and care. May God grant us his Holy Spirit so that we may not only hear God's Word, but after the hearing, ask, "Jesus, what is it that you want me to do?" and then go and do it.

**AMEN.**