

27/9/20 Trinity 16 (Harvest) Philippians 2:1-13, Matthew 21:23-33

Thank you to all of you who have generously donated to our local foodbank this morning and thank you Diana for telling us about it. I talked last week about God's generosity to us through his grace and mercy and today we give thanks for God's provision for our physical needs through the harvest and all that entails. It's been so strange this year because of all the changes caused by Covid 19, and as further restrictions are with us again, we always have the assurance of knowing that God is the one constant that will never change. Our lives have been turned upside down in so many respects, but the earth still provides as our Father intended as after the flood in Genesis, God promised Noah chapter 8 verse 22, "As long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease" and the promise holds good for us even more so now in these uncertain times.

Today we go back to the vineyard - which is apt for harvest time – and another parable from Jesus about a man who had two sons, which, as we shall see, addresses another human fault and barr to heaven.

The audience on this occasion were the chief priests and the elders who were curious to know where Jesus got his authority after hearing about the things he was doing and the crowds he was attracting. But Jesus wouldn't answer them without first asking them a question. He asked, "Did the baptism of John come from heaven, or was it of human origin?" They found this a difficult one to answer because if they said heaven, Jesus would say, then why didn't you believe him - and if human, the crowd would have something to say as they saw John as a prophet. Having the positions they held, they should have known as it was part of their job to distinguish between true and false prophets. Jesus had caught them out and humiliated them when they

had to admit that they didn't know.

Then he follows with the parable of the two sons; both were asked to go and work, the first one said no, but a bit later went, the second one said yes I'll go, but did nothing and Jesus asked them which one did the will of the Father. The first one, they said to which Jesus replied, "Truly I tell you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are going into the kingdom of God before you." In his ministry, John the Baptist had showed the way of righteousness but the Jewish leaders hadn't believed him, but those who were treated generally as lower than the low - the least bound for heaven - were the ones who *had* said 'no' and gone their own way but had listened and changed their direction, believed and eventually said 'yes'. The Elders and Chief Priests wouldn't enter God's Kingdom unless they humbled themselves before His mercy and forgiveness; so represented by the son who said 'yes' but did nothing, Jesus used their answer to highlight their own downfall.

Paying lip service to placate which doesn't get beyond words, will never take the place of obedient action which is willingly and graciously given. Matthew links Paul's letter to the Philippians which defines Jesus as the *one true obedient* Son as it shows a great example of humility. Jesus never considered himself as having equal status with God his Father, or where God's authority would be of personal benefit to him as he completely set aside his divinity and royalty to become one of us, to be a servant to others, to live selflessly and obediently, ultimately giving up his life to pay the price for our sinfulness. Jesus was and is a King who claimed no special privilege other than to obediently serve his Father.

The parables Jesus spoke addressed negative human attitudes and judgemental nature, promoting those heavenly values which are required to gain entry to the kingdom. And as I've said before, God knows a genuine heart and good deeds which come from love and obedience are essential.

Jesus said, "The last will be first, and the first will be last," so in our times of quiet, let's reflect, be quiet and listen as we gratefully consider and give thanks for all that we have and all that we are and how God's generosity has no bounds.

Let's pray:

Loving Father, whenever we are offended by your generosity or open-mindedness, give us the grace to repent and join your rejoicing. Guard the church against self-righteousness and all rules and limits which you would not own and keep always before us the rule of love.

AMEN