

“Second Thought”

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Matthew 21:28-32

Three men were waiting in the father's waiting room of the hospital. Suddenly a nurse came in and announced to one of the men, "You are the father of twins!"

"How 'bout that!" the man gleefully exclaimed. "I work for the Double Cola Company!"

A while later the nurse returned and said to the second man, "Sir, you are the father of triplets!"

"I work for 3-M," the man replied. "I guess triplets fit in perfectly!"

At this point the third man, nervously got up, put on his coat and headed for the door. "I'm getting out of here," he told the nurse. "I work for 7-UP!"

Jesus tells a story to a group of religious leaders. The story is about a Father who has two sons. And it appears that they are as different as night and day.

Now keep in mind, the religious leaders of Jesus' day were not on good terms with Jesus. If they could slip him up some way, they would be extremely happy.

Jesus knew of their hostility and dealt with it in his own creative way.

There they are gathered around Jesus in the Temple area. Jesus has just cleansed the Temple and responded to their loaded question on authority. Temperatures were rising.

Jesus now asks them a question; "What do you think?" "You are learned men, you are well versed in the law and the prophets -- What do you think?"

I am sure that this opportunity to expound their thinking and intellectual prowess - heightened their interest in the conversation.

Jesus continues; There was this Father, he had 2 sons. Good old dad went to the first son and said to him, "Son I want you to go and work in the vineyard today." The Son answered - "NO".

(You know that answer was never an option for me when dialoguing with my father. Times have changed. Things were just a little too liberal in Jesus day.)

Apparently the father accepted this reply, but we hear that the son thought better, of his answer, he had second thoughts. He decided to obey his Father and go work in the vineyard.

The Father goes to the second son and makes the same request.

Right away the boy responds, - "Sure, I'll go!" But, he did not go.

A rather straight forward story.

Pretty direct in its intent, or so it would seem. Jesus looks up at the religious leaders.

"Alright, what do you think? Which of the two sons did the father's will?" No contest.

"The First!" They call out.

"You are exactly right!" says Jesus.

"And do you know what?"

The people that you call scum; the dispossessed, the forsaken - they are preceding you into the Kingdom of God.

- Jesus is basically saying - "stay with me here." "you see John the Baptist, that one you rejected, came to you proclaiming in word and deed - the way to live in the eyes of God - and you, you religiously satisfied people did not believe him."

"And can you believe this? Those very people that you look on with disgust did believe John, did repent. And this I cannot fathom - even when you saw all of this happening, you still did not repent and believe him."

Jesus is telling those religious leaders, those stuffed shirts that they are the second son. They are the son that piously said, "Yes, Father I will obey you" and then did just the opposite.

The "scum" (as they would call them) - are in fact the first son. The disobedient son who says "No", but then has second thoughts, and obeys his father. It is hard to imagine the ferocity of feelings that these religious leaders were experiencing after this story.

Sometimes I'm amazed that Jesus lived as long as he did. We often read where numerous gangs wanted to do him harm.

Jesus, just told the elite – that those you reject, that the "scum", the dregs of society - were ahead of them in God's eyes. Jesus is trying to shock them out of their complacency. They are too comfortable with their religious lives -- their lives in general. There are no surprises in their Faith. Everything is in its place and nothing is to be disturbed. It all fits together so well, there is no need to ever have second thoughts.

But, thank God for second thoughts!

I do not know about you, but I have had many second thoughts. There have been times when I responded too quickly to a request of one of my children.

"NO", - I said. But later I realized I was wrong. My "No" became a "Yes" - with an explanation and at times an apology.

There was a time in my life when I thought I had all the answers within the religious realm. I was so sure! God is gracious - My coming of age - brought second thoughts and an openness to the mystery of Being. Not only do I not have all the answers, I don't even have all the questions.

How about you?

What do you think?

Jesus is not only talking to those leaders of 2,000 year ago.

This is a word for us today.

Those of us in our comfortable pews.

We, who are perhaps too "respectable" to consider that we need to participate in the act of repentance.

We who need to "turn around" and see things differently.

Is our theology (and all of us has one and more) set in stone?

"There is no need for second thoughts!"

"We never need to change"

History is on the side of those who have realized that the future is full of potential, and that it breaks into the present in new and creative ways.

How we must heed the warning of Jesus.

How we must be open to second thoughts.

Thoughts that turn into actions for love and justice; actions of creativity

Hear the challenge of Jesus – there are times when you need to change your “no” to a “yes”!
And keep your “yes”!

Amen.