

Just about everyone knows this type of disappointment: someone promises you something, then they don't deliver. If you've been disappointed enough, you don't even let yourself get your hopes up anymore. There are a lot of people who know what they ought to do—and promise to do it--and far fewer who actually follow through.

The simple story Jesus told the ruling priests and the elders brings this idea to light. One son says “no” to his father, but changes his mind and goes to work; the other says “yes” but never gets around to working. Who does the will of his father? Of course, the one who changed his mind and worked!

Jesus moves right from the story to its application: he told the religious people of His day that tax collectors and prostitutes are entering God's kingdom ahead of them because those “sinful” folks heard John the Baptist's preaching and it changed their minds. But it didn't change the minds or lives of the priests. It didn't change the minds or lives of the Pharisees. It didn't change the minds or lives of those who believed their “religiousness” made changing their minds unnecessary. Not only did it not change their minds, but they were enraged by the very suggestion that their minds needed changing.

So how does this simple story apply to you? Well, listen. I'm willing to bet that you have sensed God's claim on your life, and have felt called to do something for Him, and then done nothing. You may even have a pretty detailed understanding of what the Father's will is, but it hasn't moved you to action. I look in the mirror, and I see myself in that very description.

But then, there are times when you have decided to go and make a difference, and you have. You've chosen to set other things aside and do something for God. And it felt really good, like you were finally doing what you were designed to do.

The two sons that Jesus talks about, well, they both live inside of each one of us. Do you know what I mean? It's the tension that the apostle Paul was talking about when he wrote: "I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do--this I keep on doing." (Romans 7: 19) Is there any way to resolve this tension?

Let's go back to the story. By telling this story about the two sons, Jesus is making a distinction between two types of people. The distinction is, one changes his mind, changes direction, and takes action. The other knows the right thing to say, but doesn't change direction. He doesn't go anywhere or take any action. The action, or lack of action, depends on whether your mind has changed or not.

In other words, Jesus is saying this: If you believe that your status before God is a matter of your being a good religious person who has done many good deeds as proof, and you see no need to change, you are actually behind those people who have lived terrible lives, and are sick of it, and have heard the message of repentance leading to the forgiveness of sins. Strange as it sounds,

they are in a better place spiritually, Jesus says. Why? Because they're done with themselves and are totally depending on God's mercy. The ruling priests seemed to have slowly forgotten that dependence and had returned to looking at themselves, at their own resume, which made them unwilling to accept John the Baptist's and Jesus' message.

But here's a question: Why? Why should a person repent, and have the change of mind and direction that we're talking about? What's the big deal? I think it's at least partially this: God knows us and he knows we need this. He knows we need this shift from reliance on self to reliance on Him. He knows that when I put my trust in self, it's kind of a disaster. I either become a proud little brat, convinced of my own holiness, or I get so deflated by my own failures that I just stop trying. He knows that I need to take the focus off of my striving and put the focus on Jesus' striving to pay off the steep and awful debt of my sin. He knows that you and I need to practice this movement of where my real trust lies day after day after day. That's why I need to hear the Word of God, and the call to repentance, and the announcement of my sins forgiven in Jesus. That's why I need to remember my baptism and to taste the bread and wine, in which the body and blood of Jesus cleanses and feeds me. This is a life-long process, learning and re-learning dependence on God, but it is the best thing you could possibly be involved in for the sake of your mental, emotional, spiritual, and even physical health.

And when you put your full trust and your life dependence is squarely on Jesus, a funny thing happens. You can do the vineyard work; you can do the kingdom work for the right reasons. You can go and work in the Father's vineyard without any sense of "look at me" or padding your resume. You're just faithfully serving Jesus because you're thankful. It's a beautiful thing.

One group that has led the way in faithful service for many, many years is the Lutheran Womens' Missionary League. This group of women provide and support the work of gospel ministry at home and around the world. By their gathering of loose change and other offerings, the famous Mite Box, they have committed to fund projects of our own Ministry in Mission in Haiti. At the District level, they are a major donor to those studying to become pastors. Our own local expression of LWML does amazing projects that result in things like Kirsten Zimmerman being able to travel in El Salvador, and that's just their fundraising efforts. They also provide solid devotional material, retreats and Bible Studies for women, and they do all this as their thank you letter to Father, Son, and Spirit. Their Pledge, which we will all speak today, begins with the words, "in fervent gratitude for the Savior's dying love..." That's the right focus for our lives. Why should a person have the change of mind Jesus was talking about? Because it brings you back to Him. We are at our best when we are back with Him.

