

Change of Mind

The chief priests and the elders figured he was nothing but trouble. Just the day before, they shook their heads and pulled on their beards as he rode into the capital city amid a great cheering throng. And after that, they looked on, mouths agape, as he drove all the merchants and money-changers out of the temple.

Without the money-changers, all the people in town for Passover can't obtain the temple coinage needed to purchase animals. Without animals, the traditional sacrifices can't be offered. He has brought the temple's lucrative business-as-usual to a screeching halt.

Now, the next day, here he is again, back in Jerusalem. For the last time, he's entered the temple. Where he's teaching.

But the religious authorities are—to say the least—less than pleased. Looks to them like this outside agitator is trying to take over their temple. He's caused a major disruption during the biggest festival season of the year. His actions have prevented the temple—and its leaders—from making a substantial profit. He's thrown a monkey wrench into their nice, neat, customary ways of

doing things. Ways that have been in place longer than anyone can remember.

They've had just about enough of this Galilean rabbi. This Jesus. But he's *soooo* popular with the people. How can he be gotten rid of without starting a riot? Maybe they can get him to say something for which they can have him arrested. They confront him: *Who do you think you are? Where are your credentials? By whose authority do you just walk in here like you own the place?*

But just as Jesus has literally turned over tables in the temple, he now turns the tables on these chief priests and elders. Confounds them with a question of his own. *About the baptism of John—who authorized it: heaven or humans?* The leaders huddle. And decide that the safest answer to this question is *we don't know*.

But Jesus isn't finished with them. He asks a second question, one they can't get out of answering. It's a question preceded by a story about a father with two sons. A couple of rebellious kids.

Can you identify with this family? If you're a parent, did your children ever go through a rebellious stage? If my parents were here, they could tell you some stories.

But let's get back to *Jesus*' story. A father asks first one son and then the other to go and work in his vineyard. And both sons rebel, each in his own way. The first son says *heck no, I won't go*.

Have you ever reacted that way? When a parent or someone in a position of authority told you to do something? Something you knew you *should* do, something you actually had every *intention* of doing? But you said *no*, just to prove that you could? To assert your independence? Maybe that's how it is with the first son.

But pretty soon, he changes his mind. And off he goes. An hour later, his dad looks out the window and spots him over there in the vineyard, hard at work.

And then there's the second son. When *he's* asked to work in the vineyard, he says: *Sure, Dad. Be glad to*. But that afternoon, he's still lounging around playing video games. He's still doing what he's always done. He hasn't made any changes.

Jesus' question to those religious leaders—and to us today—isn't difficult. Which son did what his father asked? The one who actually went, or the one who just *said* he'd go?

Jesus wants to be sure we don't miss the striking resemblance between this second son and the chief priests and elders. Who

have said *yes* to God's word and will in the law of Moses. Who have gone out to the Jordan to hear the preaching of John the Baptist. Who have seen the transformed lives of those who believe and respond to the message of John and Jesus. But these leaders have rejected that message. They've refused to embrace it. And so they can't enter into the vineyard, which we understand as a metaphor for the kingdom Jesus proclaims. They don't enter into it. Just like the second son.

But what about the first son in Jesus' story? This first son initially balks at obeying, but then changes his mind. He represents those who originally say *no* to God's invitation of grace. But when they hear the message of John and Jesus, they change their minds. These outcasts. Tax collectors. Prostitutes. These are the ones Jesus reaches out to. These are the ones he shares table fellowship with. And these are the ones who go into God's vineyard. Into God's reign. According to Jesus, these are the *first* to enter God's kingdom.

Hmmm. Do you identify with the first of these two siblings? Or with the second? Did Jesus intend this parable to shock and to scandalize? Does it? Is it addressed not only to first-century church people, but also to twenty-first century church people? Is

Jesus talking to people who, over time, have gotten used to nice, neat, customary ways of doing things? Kind of like the mindset of the chief priests and elders?

Who admit, in answer to Jesus' question, that it was the first son—the one who said he would not go and then did—who did his father's will. And with that admission, these religious leaders condemn themselves. For they've only paid lip service to the call to faithful obedience. Like the second son, the one who talked the talk but wouldn't walk the walk. The one who never had any intention of changing his mind about the way he lived. The one who did *not* change his mind.

An unknown philosopher puts it this way: “Whatever you hold in your mind will tend to occur in your life. If you continue to believe as you have always believed, you will continue to act as you have always acted. If you continue to act as you have always acted, you will continue to get what you have always gotten. If you want different results in your life or your work, all you have to do is change your mind.”

Just change your mind. The apostle Paul invites Christians at Philippi to *let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus*. To let your mind be changed so that it will be like the mind of Jesus.

Change isn't easy for you and me. But because the gospel and teachings of the One we follow are radically countercultural, following him requires radical change.

For we live within a culture that's all about self. Self-conscious. Self-sufficient. Self-indulgent. Self-absorbed.

But having the mind of Christ means turning away from self-preoccupation. Means that we no longer belong to ourselves, but to him. Means that our lives are no longer our own, but lived in him.

Having the mind of Christ means bending my will to his will. Means surrendering all to the One who came to the cross, who gave all that he had, who emptied himself, who let his body be broken and his blood be poured out for you and me.

Having the mind of Christ means coming, in his spirit of humility and self-emptying, to the table of grace. Coming empty so that we may be filled with him. So that we may be of one mind with him and with one another.

Having the mind of Christ means sharing a common life as brothers and sisters in the family of faith. Living together in harmony. In peace. In unity.

And having the mind of Christ means opening ourselves to the One who is working within us and calling us to work in the vineyard. This is the One who instills in us the desire and the energy to extend his table outside these walls. To minister to God's people, to the least and the last and the lost.

Having the mind of Christ means praying to be used as an instrument of God's compassion and as a vessel of God's love.

Having the mind of Christ means sharing his good news with those on the margins, with those who most need to hear it.

Having the mind of Christ means offering acts of caring and kindness.

Having the mind of Christ means being in mission to make disciples for him for the transformation of the world.

Beloved, Jesus is asking you today: *What do you think? Will you change your mind? Will you let my mind grow in you?*

Can you hear him?

In the name of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Amen.