

A Change of Heart and Mind

Sermon notes for the sermon
Given by Rev. Dr. Gregory B. Young
On Sunday, September 25, 2011

The story is told of two old golfers who were playing 18 holes of golf one day. They were tied going into the last hole and the match came down to the very last putt. If the golfer sinks the putt he wins the match. As he is carefully reading the green and lining up his shot he is suddenly distracted by a funeral procession passing by the golf course. The old golfer puts down his club, stands at attention and removes his hat placing it over his heart. When the funeral procession passes out of sight he puts his hat back on, picks up his putter and sinks the putt to win the match. His friend looks at him and says, "That was downright respectful of you to stop in the middle of the most important shot of the match and risk losing just to honor the dead. I am very touched by your compassion." To which the old golfer replied, "Well, my friend, it was the least I could do since I was married to her for over 40 years."

Sometimes we get our priorities all mixed up. Like the old golfer we choose to do one thing while neglecting another more important and necessary thing. Children come home from school and want before anything can be said they are playing on the Wii or the PS3 or texting their friends. After dinner they would be happy to continue their play but then the word comes from Mom and Dad, "It is time to do your homework!" I remember times when we would say that to our boys

and they would say okay I will get right on it and run up to their bedroom. A few minutes later we would check in on them only to discover that they were not doing their homework and instead were playing with toys or talking to friends. It is one thing to say that you are going to do something and another to actually do it.

How many times have you said to your supervisor, "Okay, I will take care of that project," only to mumble under your breath, "But I really don't want to?" You then proceeded to drag your feet and take your time on a piece of work that was needed quickly. You really did not want to do the will of your supervisor but you also knew that your livelihood and the well-being of your family depended on the job. So, you said 'yes,' thought 'no'" and your performance of the task reflected the conflict that was in your mind. Or worse yet, you never completed the task giving your supervisor excuse after excuse why you could not do it.

In Jesus' time the Pharisees thought that what was important to God was how righteous they looked before God. They would make their weekly trip to the Temple or the synagogue, standing in what they believed to be God's holy presence and think to themselves, "God, look at me. I must look very good to you because I try to keep all of your laws and commands, and here I stand to worship your holiness and praise your name. I am not like those other people who waste their time breaking the rules and don't even come to worship you." Jesus loved the Pharisees enough to publicly point out to them the

error of their ways. The issue for Jesus was not looking good before God. Rather, it was about living well before God.

By living well Jesus was not saying that the person of faith needed to keep a check list or score card to indicate how well one was doing – the Pharisees were doing this. Instead, Jesus was pointing to two significant relationships – our relationship with God and our relationship with the people around us. Put simply Jesus was calling the people of his day to have a strong, trusting and obedient relationship with God that would then be seen in the relationships of daily living.

The Pharisees had used God's laws and commands to erect high walls around themselves protecting and insulating them from others who disregarded God. In essence they said to themselves we are the saved and those who are not religious as we are the damned. They had given-up on the sinners of the world and cared only for their relationship with God. They had said 'yes' to God by living the law but had said 'no' to God by not allowing the law to make a difference in the lives of others.

In those who were responding to his teaching and preaching – the tax collectors and prostitutes – and entering into a deeper relationship with God Jesus saw those who initially had said 'no' to God and totally went astray and were no beginning to say 'yes,' living their lives in the light of God's holy presence.

Today's Gospel reading invites us to take inventory of our own lives of faith. How is my walk with God? Do I just think of God when I enter

the sanctuary and count it a blessing that I am numbered among those whom God favors? Does God's love so permeate my being that others know before I am even aware that God is using me to bring the good news of Jesus Christ to them? Is what I profess with my lips on Sunday present in my actions and living every other day of the week? Do I see myself better than others and as one who in God's eyes is more worthy of God's grace than those around me? Has my faith enabled me to build walls to insulate and protect me or has it enabled me to build bridges that bring me into contact with those I most despise or who most despise me?

Each time we gather in this place and in each moment of our lives Jesus is seeking to affect a change of heart and mind for all people. He calls us to a strong, growing and deepening relationship with God. He also calls us to a strong, growing and deepening relationship with each other. Further, Jesus calls us as a church to have a passion for those who live their lives outside of these walls. He calls us to see others as God sees them and to then love them as God loves them.