

The Nineteenth Sunday of Pentecost

September 25, 2005

Ezekiel 18: 1-4, 25-32

Psalm 25; 3-9

Philippians 2: 1-13

Matthew 21: 28-32

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

“Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.” Wrong! Our salvation is God’s business. Our Lord Jesus Christ accomplished our salvation long ago in His sacrifice for us on the cross. As a sign of that, God is at work in us for his “good pleasure.”

What pleases God? That is an ancient question indeed. I think Ezekiel answered it many, many years ago. Ezekiel tells us, “Turn and live.”

To live is to turn away from wickedness and to do what is lawful and right. Otherwise, you do not please God; in fact you reject God, separate yourself from Him, and that is spiritual death.

God asks, and it is not a rhetorical question, given that choice: “Why will you die?”

There are many, many answers to that question, all of which can be summed up in the words “selfishness” and “conceit.” They are what kill us. That’s Paul’s message to the Christians at Philippi.

Such is that little story about the two brothers working in the field. The first brother says, when his father asks him to work, “I will not.” He

has better things to do, more important things to do, and besides it's too hot, and the work is too hard, and he doesn't have the right clothes, and his father should hire some less important people to do such menial tasks. That's selfish. That's conceited.

But then he knows that his father needs him. And then, happily, he "turns and lives." He manages to go beyond his own selfish wants and actually serves his father.

Number two son never gets that far. He knows from the first that he's not going anywhere near that field. Why argue? Why make a scene. It's just too much trouble to get into a discussion of work ethics, so he says "yes" and means "no." He stays self-centered. He stays conceited. He never does the work that his father needs him to do. He never turns.

The point of it all is this. Humility is good!

Who is the perfect model of humility? If ever a son labored in his father's field, it would be Jesus. If ever one demonstrated humility, actually taking on the nature of one of us – our very fragile humanity – and moreover the nature of a servant – a servant of all; you and me – it would be Jesus.

We really must remember that, in his humanity Jesus was as subject to the pressure of selfishness and conceit as we are but did not succumb. He lived His life and went to His death for others.

Jesus is a son who said, "I go, sir," and actually goes.

The question then is, "what kind of son or daughter are we?" My guess is that most of us, perhaps all of us, fall somewhere between brother one and brother two. We have a good idea of what God would have us do, what pleases God. We know what is "lawful and right." We cannot claim ignorance of what it means to be a Christian. In short

we know perfectly well how we should be and what we should do, and, occasionally, we emulate Christ and actually do it.

Is it to “work out our own salvation?” In all honesty, you and I do know people who think so. They really think they are buying their way into heaven. They’re wrong.

We emulate Our Lord not for our sake but His. We do the will of God because it is God’s will and simply that. In doing the will of God we turn, and in turning we live.

In that I dare say, God takes great pleasure.

In His Holy Name.