

## **Sermon 27 September 2020, 16<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Trinity**

Reverend Irene

Matthew 21: 23-32

If you agree to do something, do it with good grace or not at all.

This is advice passed on to me by my mother and advice I passed on to my sons. I was particularly pleased to hear one of my sons saying it to his son recently, especially as we have been talking about “grace” in our Explore the Book sessions. What is grace? It cannot be earned, it cannot be bought.

Grace is God’s gift to us, His love in action.

There are certain people in today’s Gospel who do not see things that way.

We know that the Pharisees, chief priests and scribes in Jesus’ day took every opportunity to question him in an attempt to trap him on a charge of blasphemy. In this instance they questioned his right and authority to do the things he did. Jesus still had work to do before his arrest and crucifixion, so not wanting to enter into a discussion on the fact that his authority came from being the Son of God, he responded with a question of his own, which placed them in a dilemma.

He asked if the ministry of John the Baptist came from heaven or from men. In other words, were those baptised by John answering a divine challenge or merely acting on a human impulse? If the Jewish authorities said the ministry of John was from God, then they had to admit that Jesus was the Messiah, just as John had proclaimed. If they denied the ministry of John came from God, they would have to deal with the anger of people who believed John and who followed Jesus.

The bravado of the accusers was quashed as they meekly admitted they didn’t know the answer, but as members of the Sanhedrin, the highest courts of justice in Jerusalem, they surely should have been able to distinguish between true and false prophets, they had the knowledge of the scriptures, miracles and signs, it was their job.

Jesus then went on to tell the story of two brothers who were ordered by their father to work in the vineyard, the first son initially refused to go, but later went. The second son did the opposite and said he would do as he was asked, but changed his mind and did not go.

Jesus asked “Which of the two sons did the will of his father?”

This parable doesn’t really give credit to anybody or either son, both were disrespectful of their Father and unsatisfactory in their actions. The perfect son would have done what was requested by their father without question and with loyalty.

## The Benefice of Cogenhoe and Great Houghton and Little Houghton with Brafield on the Green

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The meaning of the parable is clear. The Jewish leaders are the people who promised to obey God and then did not, feeling their power was being threatened by the actions of Jesus! The tax gatherers and prostitutes said they would go their own way in life, yet as a result of Jesus' teaching, they changed their minds and took God's path.

The story shows us that people fall into different categories in life, those who make promises eagerly, knowing they are not going to keep them, and then those who grumble and protest, yet in the end will do the kindly thing.

I'm sure we all know people of both kinds in our lives and even within our church. Those who on outer appearances do and say the right things, but on the other hand gossip and hurt others at the drop of a hat. We also come across many people who profess not to believe in God, yet in reality they live more Christian lives than many Christians.

The message of the gospel today is that promises can never take the place of actions, and fine words are not a substitute for good deeds. Jesus teaches us to beware of wrong attitudes and to be aware that we all have a duty of love and care for each other, and for God.

Going back to what my mother said, good works can be spoiled if not undertaken from the heart and with grace.

As Christians, following the way of Christ, everything we do should be undertaken with God's grace and in his grace, making use of his wonderful gift to us.

Amen