

## It's Never Too Late to Change

### Scripture Background

*This information isn't meant to be read aloud, but as background for the leader. If helpful, share some of it in conversation with the group.*

All three readings today give advice and encouragement for every person to live an upstanding life. The first reading from Ezekiel does this by way of a threat that was in keeping with how the ancient Jews thought of life and death. The idea of everlasting heaven and hell hadn't developed yet, so they didn't believe in the afterlife as we do. They thought that if you don't live a just and virtuous life, your punishment would be an early death. On the flip side, if you lived well, you would earn yourself a longer life. It's not hard to imagine how that thinking developed into the Christian understanding that how we live on earth will determine our fate for the afterlife. Jesus, and later St. Paul, expanded on this idea by stressing that God's mercy and grace reach beyond human behavior. We don't earn our salvation—God grants it.

### Opening Prayer

*Pray the following aloud together, beginning with the Sign of the Cross:*

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

Gracious God, may you open our hearts to the message your scripture has for us today.

Let us be comforted in ways we need to be comforted,  
and may we hear your invitation to a new way of living.

We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

### Gospel Reading: Matthew 21:28-32

*Ask someone to read this passage aloud, then pause for a minute of silence.*

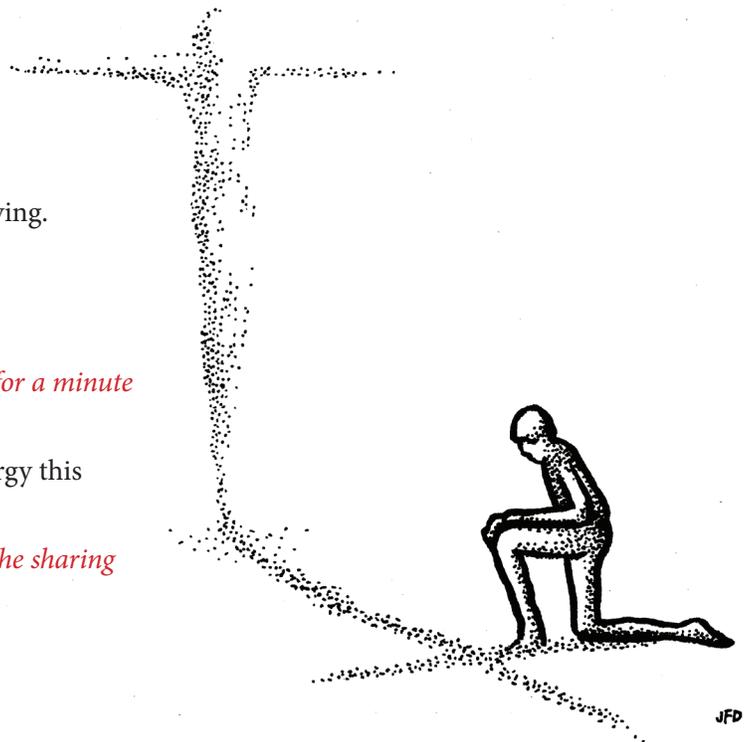
*Ask:* What struck you about this reading or the liturgy this week?

*Allow for sharing. Move on to the next section once the sharing has died down.*

September 27, 2020 • Year A

26th Sunday in Ordinary Time

- ▶ Ezekiel 18:25-28 - Personal responsibility
- ▶ Philippians 2:1-11 - Imitating Christ
- ▶ Matthew 21:28-32 - Parable of the two sons



## Reflections on the Reading

*Invite each person in the circle to read one paragraph aloud:*

Jesus' parable today seems straight-forward. Although ideally, a child would agree to do what a parent asked and then follow through. If that's not the case, the next best outcome would be for the child to ultimately do what he or she was asked, even if they didn't agree to it initially. The chief priests and elders knew right away that is the preferred outcome compared to a son who promises something but doesn't follow through. So what is the point of the parable? It seems so obvious.

The kicker comes when we think about who Jesus is addressing here. He is talking to the chief priests and elders, the ones who thought they were the good ones, the righteous ones, the virtuous, chosen ones who deserved to be handed the Kingdom of Heaven because of their good behavior. Yet he points out that when John the Baptist came preaching repentance, inclusion, and economic and social justice, they dismissed him and ignored his message. On the other hand, the tax collectors and prostitutes (people looked down upon and ridiculed by the chief priest and elders) listened and heeded John the Baptist. They had the humility to recognize they needed to ask forgiveness and change their ways, and they did. Suddenly, Jesus' point becomes clear—it's never too late to change our ways, ask for forgiveness, and be welcomed into the Kingdom. On the other hand, if we say we want to do God's will, but never get around to it, we are no better than the hypocritical chief priests and elders.

## Questions for Discussion

*Read each question aloud, one at a time, followed by time for sharing.*

- ① Who do you relate most to—the first or second son? Why?
- ② Think about an example from your life of someone who “repented” and ultimately did the right thing, even though it didn't appear that they would at first. Please share.
- ③ Is there something God might be asking you to do that you are putting off or resisting? Please share.

## Closing Prayer

*Pray the following aloud together:*

Lord, thank you for the gift of your living word.

Grant that our reading and study of Scripture lead us to live more faithful lives.

We ask this in Jesus' name,

Amen.