

Sermon for the 17th Sunday after Pentecost
October 1, 2017

Ezekiel 19:1-4, 25-32

Philippians 2:1-13

Psalms 25: 1-8

Matthew 21:23-32

In Jesus' Parable of the two sons, which son did the will of the father? Is it possible that the two sons were the same person?

I'd like to share two scenarios that might support the theory that the two sons could have been the same person.

The phone rings. The caller ID says it's your mother-in-law. Oh no! Not my mother-in-law. Poor woman is going through a rough time, but there's no time to talk to her today. The ringing stops. Whew, a bullet has been dodged! But you stare at the phone. You wonder if she's okay. So you dial her number. "Hi, mom! Sorry I missed your call but I was in the middle of hauling in groceries. What's up?"

Pause

The phone rings again. This time it's a dad from the neighborhood putting together a crew for Saturday morning to go over and fix up the ball field behind the school – to rake it out, repair the fences, and paint the scoreboard.

You say, "That's a great idea! We've been worried about the kids getting hurt on that field. Anything I can do to help? Let me check my calendar for Saturday and if I can make it there, I will. Thanks for putting this together, neighbor. We all appreciate it."

But Saturday morning is your weekly golf game and you have no intention of missing it. Oh well! The neighbor has it all under control. They can get along without me.

Pause

When we respond to similar situations differently, it becomes easier to relate to the two sons. Sometimes our sense of empathy manages to overcome our busyness; at other times, we're happy to say the right thing at the moment, with no intention of following through. But compassion and gratitude are only words until we live them in acts of generosity and kindness. Discipleship begins with realizing Christ's presence in our midst and then reflecting that presence in the compassion and peace we extend.

In Paul's letter to the Philippians, a dispute happened when two leaders of the church in Philippi were not in agreement. Paul does not tell us what the argument was about. However, he knew that the clash of wills was causing real wounds within the community.

When differences in opinions persist, wounds fester over time. The original impasse is often forgotten. Conversation about the original matter spirals out-of-control. Nothing gets resolved.

In Paul LeClair's sermon from last Sunday, he spoke about social justice issues. He stated, "There are no easy answers to the social issues of poverty, addiction, race relations, political polarity, and the great number of other issues. Personal dilemmas such as how best to care for a loved one, dealing with a difficult client or work partner, or facing financial challenges can be an overwhelming and equally as confusing for us as society's problems."

Discussing political issues are often avoided especially in church settings – particularly when a preacher is sharing thoughts and raising questions. I am sticking my neck out this morning to call

your attention to two proposals we will be hearing much about in the days ahead. Remember I am just a messenger sharing information that has come to my attention. My purpose is strictly meant to raise awareness of two issues we will all be faced with.

Petitions are currently being circulated to get two proposals on the ballot for the November 2018 election. One proposal is to legalize marijuana for recreational use. The other proposal is for a constitutional amendment to end gerrymandering in Michigan. Each group circulating the petitions will need 316,000 valid signatures for the proposals to make the ballot.

Currently, in our state people are able to use marijuana for medicinal purposes. Now many want to legalize recreational use of marijuana. It is my understanding that proponents want marijuana to be regulated like alcohol. The proposal would allow Michigan the highest possession limits of all the states that currently legalize recreational usage. A few samples of some of the concerns are:

- The proposal would not regulate the potency of marijuana. Today's drug is much more potent than that of the 1980's.
- The proposal does not address possible additives in a marijuana cigarette.
- Legalization has unforeseen consequences for business and the economy.
- Fines range from \$100 to \$2000 (for multiple offenses) so they are too small to make an impact or change behavior.
- The proposal does not allow someone to obtain FOIA (Freedom of Information Act) information about who owns and operates a growing establishment. That means if the business presents problems in the community, using the FOIA would not be possible.
- Individuals circulating the petitions for recreational marijuana usage are being paid to do so.

- If you are interested in learning more, my friend Dee Sarosy will be available to share information and answer questions you may have about the proposal for recreational marijuana use. Dee is an unpaid member of the core committee for the Chippewa Valley Coalition for Youth and Families. The group's goal is to educate people on the dangers of marijuana usage. She will be seated in the parish hall during coffee hour.

Many of you know, our family was affected by drug addiction which included the use of marijuana. I have strong feelings about the issue and have become very involved with support groups such as Families Against Narcotics and Families Anonymous. I strongly believe that today's marijuana and opiates are gateway drugs that can lead to usage of heroin, cocaine, and other dangerous drugs.

Even though our loved one is doing well now, I know what affect legalizing recreational marijuana could present to him and others in the future. I find the proposal very concerning. The important thing for all of us is to educate ourselves before we head to the polls on November 8, 2018. We are Christ's disciples. We need to act with awareness, understanding and compassion. We might want to ask ourselves, "What Would Jesus Want Us to Do?"

The second ballot proposal involves a constitutional amendment to end gerrymandering in Michigan. Currently, many concerned citizens are attempting to collect the 316,000 valid signatures to get the proposal on the ballot for November, 2018. The endeavor is a non-partisan grass roots organization comprised solely of unpaid volunteers. The hope is that an independent committee of registered voters will be formed and comprised of 4 Republicans, 4 Democrats, and 5 Independents.

Gerrymandering is the political tactic of redrawing boundaries of voting districts to favor one political party. The independent committee would redraw the boundaries so each person's vote would be more likely to count.

Again no matter your viewpoint, we need to educate ourselves on the issue so we can make an informed decision when we sign petitions or vote. We may feel strongly one way or another but have no intention of even voting. Voting is a privilege not to be ignored.

Today we will have an opportunity to sign the petition to get the gerrymandering proposal on the ballot. My cousin, Ruth Kashouty, is here with us today. She will be seated at a table in the parish hall for anyone who desires to sign the petition to allow us to vote on the proposal in November of 2018. Ruth has petitions for whatever county you reside. She is willing to answer any questions and concerns you may have.

Paul's sermon last week also reminded us that our Presiding Bishop Michael Curry shared in a recent reflection, "It may be that we cannot solve everything, and we cannot do everything. But we can do something, no matter what."

I encourage you to learn all you can about the two proposals that were presented this morning and join me in prayer.

If you will turn to pages 821 and 822 of the Book of Common Prayer found at the end of the pews, we will read the Litany for Sound Government. Please join me by responding to the words in italics.

Resources for this sermon:

- Book of Common Prayer, pages 821 and 822
- New International Study Bible

- Connection for October 1, 2017
- Information provided by Steven Kaplan, J.D. about marijuana proposal for the state of Michigan and the Chippewa Valley Coalition for Youth and Families
- Gerrymandering Proposal provided by votersnotpoliticians.com and Ruth Massad-Kashouty, a petition trained and unpaid circulator
- Paul LeClair's sermon for Sunday, September 24, 2017.