

# Homily for the 26<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Times

September 30-October 1, 2017

Readings: Ezekiel 18: 25-28; Philippians 2:1-11; Matthew 21:28-32

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Actions do speak louder than words. Jesus' parable about two brothers and the vineyard is a perfect illustration of this. Although the first brother said that he would not go to the vineyard and work, he changed his mind and did. The second brother said that he would go to the vineyard, but he did not. What good were his words, if they were not followed by actions?

Since we live within a two-hour drive of over 100 wineries, many of us do realize how much work needs to be done in vineyards, especially at this time of year, but at other times as well. No wine will be produced if no work is done in the vineyards.

In our scriptures, the vineyard is a metaphor for the world we humans have created. Is it the world that God wants for us? Far from it. The harvest can be equated to the coming of God's kingdom, but it won't happen if we don't do the necessary work. It won't happen if we keep putting up barriers.

A few years ago, I asked a rabbi about a difficult passage in the Hebrew Bible, where people were doing terrible things, apparently with God's approval. His answer was quite simple but very challenging: "We have free will!" We can choose to do good or to do evil, as the prophet Ezekiel told the Jewish people when they were in exile in Babylon and thought that God had abandoned them. It was possible, even in this situation, for them "to do what is right and just."

Paul's letter to the Philippians tells us what "doing what is right and just" can mean. Acting with compassion and mercy. Realizing that the world does not revolve around us, and putting the needs and interests of other people first. We have witnessed some truly inspiring and even heroic examples of this, as people have helped one another in the areas hit by this summer's hurricanes and the earthquakes in Mexico. People have gone out of their way to help. My sister-in-

law in Florida got her power back because of workers who came from Kansas! And people who could not personally go to these areas, have donated millions of dollars in aid to our fellow human beings.

But it shouldn't take a disaster to motivate us to go into the vineyard and work. We can do it every day, at every moment of our lives. But if things are going well for us, we should not, like those ancient priests and elders, become too self-confident, presuming that we know it all and that of course God approves of all that we are doing. Jesus pointed out that people the Jerusalem authorities considered unclean outcasts would enter the kingdom ahead of them. Why? Because these people knew that they were totally dependent upon God.

Back to our parable: I am challenged every day to not just say that I will do some good, but to actually do it. I always have the excuse that I am too busy, and I suspect that many of us in today's world would say the same thing. We might be in the vineyard, but we're not doing the things necessary to bring in a bountiful harvest.

As followers of Jesus, we all have a calling from God, to continue his mission in our time and place, to continue working in the vineyard. I am inspired by a man I know who helped set up an eye clinic in Zambia this summer and by the people who are working with recent immigrants in Rochester. They are doing great work in the vineyard that is our world. So can we all.