

Mt. 21.23-32; Philippians 2.1-13; Ezekiel 18.1-4, 25 – end.  
Harvest Sunday (Trinity 15)  
8:00 & 10:00 am, 28<sup>th</sup> Sept. 2014; St. Andrew's, Totteridge

*May the Lord now be in all our hearts, and upon my lips, that every thought and word may be wholly for the honour and glory of his name. Amen.*

I want to tell you a lighthearted story about having faith, you may have heard it - it's about the kind of harvest that faith can bring about and it's called: **Two Frogs in the Milk**

So this is the story of the two frogs. One frog was fat and the other skinny. One day, while searching for food, they inadvertently jumped into a vat of milk. They couldn't get out, as the sides were too slippery, so they just had to swim around and around.

The fat frog said to the skinny frog, "Brother frog, there's no use paddling any longer. We're just going to drown, so we might as well give up." The skinny frog replied, "Hold on brother, keep paddling. Somebody will get us out." And they continued paddling for hours.

After a while, the fat frog said, "Brother frog, there's no use. I'm becoming very tired now. I'm just going to stop paddling and drown. It's Sunday and nobody's working. We're doomed. There's no possible way out of here." But the skinny frog said, "Keep trying. Keep paddling. Something will happen, just keep paddling."

Two more hours passed by.

The fat frog said, "I can't go on any longer. There's no sense in doing this because we're going to drown anyway. What's the use?" And the fat frog stopped. He just gave up. And he drowned in the milk.

But the skinny frog kept on paddling.

Ten minutes later, the skinny frog felt something a little firmer beneath his feet, and as he continued paddling round and round, he realized what was happening. He'd paddled the milk so much that he'd begun to churn it into butter, and as it continued to solidify he found that eventually, he could quite easily just hop out of the vat. (*Melissa D Zartman*)

So in this story the faithful frog hadn't given up - he'd had faith that, even though he couldn't understand how he might be saved, he still had to have hope. Well most of us in a similar situation might think we'd have to have a little bit more than blind faith in order to be saved, but that's not how it is if we want to follow in Christ's footsteps and enjoy the fruits of his harvest.

In Matthew's gospel, Jesus is questioned by the chief priests and elders and asked, by what authority are you doing these things? Now I have to say that this did remind me a little of the last meeting of the PCC..., but that's a whole other story!

More seriously, Jesus responds to this veiled criticism by asking a question of his own, a question about what the priests and elders believe in? Are they capable of faith or trust in someone like John the Baptist who is trying to do the work of God? – and of course, fearing the response of the crowd, the priests and elders evade giving a straight answer by giving no answer at all.

So Jesus tells a story of his own, not about frogs but the **Parable of the Two Sons**: In the first example, the son at first refuses to work in the vineyard but later did as he was bid; in the second, the son said he would obey, but for whatever reason never actually did. Neither of these two just simply did as they were asked. Neither of them were prepared to go directly into the vineyard and help reap the harvest that the father had provided.

And that's why Jesus says that the tax collectors, the likes of Matthew who wrote this gospel, and the prostitutes, the so-called 'fallen women' are, according to Jesus, going to get into the Kingdom of God before the so-called 'holy men', the chief priests and elders, who aren't prepared to have faith in anyone other than themselves.

Because the tax collectors, and prostitutes, those deemed 'unworthy', unlearned, ignorant and sinful, did recognise and believe in the baptist without any equivocation. They flocked to submit to his baptism just as Jesus did himself. They recognised an authentic speaker of God's word when they heard one. How does Jesus put it elsewhere?..., 'my people hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me (Jn 10:27).'

And this is the same plea that Paul puts to his people in Philippi – 'make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. <sup>3</sup>Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. <sup>4</sup>Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. <sup>5</sup>Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus.'

John the Baptist knew that he himself wasn't perfect, that he should be prepared to be baptized by Jesus and not the other way round. He knew he wasn't fit to tie his sandals, that he must inevitably be diminished and give way to the Son of God. And the Apostle Paul acknowledges that God is actually at work in each and every one of us, asking us to believe in him, to believe his word, to have faith in any authentic Christian voices that struggle, or paddle(!), to follow in the way of Christ.

We are each being summoned to work in the vineyard, to recognise that God loves us and surrounds us with abundance in so many ways. The question for us is, as it was for the Two Sons, how willing are we to work in the vineyard and enjoy the true harvest of our Father in heaven?

*Spoken in the name of the Father, Son & Holy Spirit. Amen.*

## **Matthew 21.23-32 The Authority of Jesus Questioned**

23 When he entered the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came to him as he was teaching, and said, 'By what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?' 24 Jesus said to them, 'I will also ask you one question; if you tell me the answer, then I will also tell you by what authority I do these things. 25 Did the baptism of John come from heaven, or was it of human origin?' And they argued with one another, 'If we say, "From heaven", he will say to us, "Why then did you not believe him?" 26 But if we say, "Of human origin", we are afraid of the crowd; for all regard John as a prophet.' 27 So they answered Jesus, 'We do not know.' And he said to them, 'Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things.'

### **The Parable of the Two Sons**

28 'What do you think? A man had two sons; he went to the first and said, "Son, go and work in the vineyard today." 29 He answered, "I will not"; but later he changed his mind and went. 30 The father went to the second and said the same; and he answered, "I go, sir"; but he did not go. 31 Which of the two did the will of his father?' They said, 'The first.' Jesus said to them, 'Truly I tell you, the tax-collectors and the prostitutes are going into the kingdom of God ahead of you. 32 For John came to you in the way of righteousness and you did not believe him, but the tax-collectors and the prostitutes believed him; and even after you saw it, you did not change your minds and believe him.'

## **Ezekiel 18.1-4, 25 – end Individual Retribution**

18

The word of the Lord came to me: 2 What do you mean by repeating this proverb concerning the land of Israel, 'The parents have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge'? 3 As I live, says the Lord God, this proverb shall no more be used by you in Israel. 4 Know that all lives are mine; the life of the parent as well as the life of the child is mine: it is only the person who sins that shall die.

25 Yet you say, 'The way of the Lord is unfair.' Hear now, O house of Israel: Is my way unfair? Is it not your ways that are unfair? 26 When the righteous turn away from their righteousness and commit iniquity, they shall die for it; for the iniquity that they have committed they shall die. 27 Again, when the wicked turn away from the wickedness they have committed and do what is lawful and right, they shall save their life. 28 Because they considered and turned away from all the transgressions that they had committed, they shall surely live; they shall not die. 29 Yet the house of Israel says, 'The way of the Lord is unfair.' O house of Israel, are my ways unfair? Is it not your ways that are unfair?

30 Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, all of you according to your ways, says the Lord God. Repent and turn from all your transgressions; otherwise iniquity will be your ruin. 31 Cast away from you all the transgressions that you have committed against me, and get yourselves a new heart and a new spirit! Why will you die, O house of Israel? 32 For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone, says the Lord God. Turn, then, and live.

## Philippians 2.1-13 Imitating Christ's Humility

2

If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, <sup>2</sup>make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. <sup>3</sup>Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. <sup>4</sup>Let each of you look not to your

own interests, but to the interests of others. <sup>5</sup>Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,

<sup>6</sup> who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited,

<sup>7</sup> but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness.

And being found in human form,

<sup>8</sup> he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross.

<sup>9</sup> Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name,

<sup>10</sup> so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend,

in heaven and on earth and under the earth,

<sup>11</sup> and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

<sup>12</sup> Therefore, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed me, not only in my presence, but much more now in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; <sup>13</sup>for it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

*The New Revised Standard Version (Anglicized Edition)*, copyright 1989, 1995 by the Division of Christian Education of the [National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America](#). Used by permission. All rights reserved.