

26th Sunday 2008

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

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A man had two sons, he said to the first, go and work in the vineyard...

I have a question for you. What's your vineyard like? I doubt that any of you (except Steve Sheehan one of our parishioners who is a wine maker) has a vineyard). As you know the "vineyard" is one of the primary biblical symbols used by the Hebrew prophets and Jesus. Today we hear a parable about the vineyard, last week we did as well and guess what's in store for next week. Another vineyard parable. So what does this image mean for you. As Jesus asks, What is your opinion?

What does it mean for you to be sent out to labor in the vineyard? I think the question for us who believe in God and are followers of Jesus is this; What are the places where you go to plant the good news of the gospel? How do you model the compassion, forgiveness, and love of the neighbor that Jesus calls us to in your your workplace, in your school, in your community, wherever you are engaged? What difference does what you do here in this church today make for your daily life? Are you a head nodder like the second son who says sure I will do your work in the vineyard and then forgets about it or are you a naysayer who has a change of heart and goes to work in the vineyard after a change of mind and heart?

What is your vineyard or vineyards like? Are you free to speak of your faith? How do you try to live as a follower of Jesus in a world where there are different beliefs systems or even none at all. If you are not able to speak about your faith in your workplace, do you "have in yourself the mind that was in Christ jesus". Just a question for you today since we're hearing so much about vineyards in the

scriptures these weeks. (say something about the discussion group after the 10)

My vineyard has changed dramatically in the past few months. Although I'm still laboring in the vineyard here at ST Ignatius which is a wonderful one with luxuriant vines. The fruit of the vine that comes from working here creates the best wines of Christian faith and service, maybe a Chateau Neuf du Pape. And I only get sour grapes from time to time.

My new vineyard is the parish of St Mary of the angels in Roxbury. It's much smaller vineyard but it too is rich with branches of faith and service that connect people to each other and to the one true vine Jesus Christ. This community of faith gathers Latinos, African Americans, khmu, anglo, Jamaicans together as branches of this vine. It's a harvest of pinot noir, riojas, California chardonnay. But in this vineyard I've already discovered the grapes of wrath. It's the violence that comes from poverty, drugs and unemployment. In the next two days we will have a wake and funeral for a young man of 26 who was shot last Sunday on streets of Boston. This is not the kind of vineyard that I'm used to working in. And quite honestly, a good part of me is so afraid that I would like to avoid the vineyard at all costs (kind of like that son in the story.)

But then I hear the second part of the parable. Imagine the shock of those righteous who heard Jesus saying that it was the outcasts of society, the tax-collectors and prostitutes, maybe even gang members who are entering the kingdom of God.. not because of what they have done but perhaps because there is the possibility of a change of heart, an openness to a radical dependency upon God. I'd like to invite you to come and visit my other vineyard and experience another form of faith and the face of Jesus Christ in other forms.

So what's your vineyard like? Or what is it like to labor in your vineyard? What we hear over and over

in the scriptures is that our world is God's vineyard. And God so loved the world... You know the rest. Elizabeth Johnson in her recent book "Quest for the Living God" which incidentally some of us are reading in our parish reading group, says this. I think her words reflect beautifully the text of Paul's letter to the Phillipians which we hear today and heard only two weeks ago on the feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross.

"At the heart of Christian faith is the almost unbelievable idea that the infinitely incomprehensible holy mystery of God does not remain forever remote but draws near in radical proximity to the world. This is accomplished in a single act of self-bestowal that shows itself in two mutually conditioning elements. In doctrinal terms these are incarnation and grace: in personal terms they are Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. Together they form the self-communicating gift pulsing outward from the depth of the divine being whereby this holy mystery draws near to the world in unspeakable nearness."

Or as St Paul says. Though he was in the form of God, he did not regard equality with God as something to be grasped at. Rather he emptied himself.

He went to work in the vineyard.