

Matthew 21:28-32

‘What do you think? A man had two sons; he went to the first and said, “Son, go and work in the vineyard today.” He answered, “I will not”; but later he changed his mind and went. The father went to the second and said the same; and he answered, “I go, sir”; but he did not go. 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. 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.

Philippians 2:1-13

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

*who, though he was in the form of God,
did not regard equality with God
as something to be exploited,
but emptied himself,
taking the form of a slave,
being born in human likeness.
And being found in human form,
he humbled himself
and became obedient to the point of death—
even death on a cross.*

*Therefore God also highly exalted him
and gave him the name
that is above every name,
so that at the name of Jesus
every knee should bend,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
and every tongue should confess
that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.*

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; for it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

This is the Word of the Lord...

My freshman year in college I decided to give being a DJ a try. Eckerd College had only 1600 undergrads at the time and the radio waves from the station got to at least... ten of them. The

station was so weak that basically the only place you could hear the station without interference was through the speaker that was used to keep the door going into the station propped open.

My Resident Advisor(RA) introduced me to the guy who ran the station. He was wearing a Jimmy Page t-shirt, and I was wearing my Disney Christian music festival Night of Joy t-shirt. This was going to go well.

He was finishing up his 2 hour time slot and told me I had five minutes to pull the records I wanted to play. I knew exactly zero about music so I pulled out a Pink Floyd album that matched the posters I'd seen in a couple of my friends' rooms, a Depeche Mode album because it was 1988, and a few others. I heard the manager and my RA talking about me and how she thought I'd be great at the DJ gig and then I went over to the console and heard the last commercial playing.

3... 2...1...

I froze. I played nothing. I said nothing.

The dead air blaring from the speaker propping open the door was suffocating.

"Do something! Anything!" Jimmy Page shirt hissed.

And then as if he thought I was a confused movie starlet of the 1920's he yelled, "Action! Action!"

Thus endeth my radio career.

My RA had talked me up. In my mind I thought I could be DJ material, but when talk needed to become action – nothing.

The Revised Common Lectionary texts for today revolve around action. Exodus – which we didn't read – has the Israelites after their escape from Egypt, but not even close to the Promised Land whining about being thirsty. "*Why did you bring us out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst?*"

Moses is instructed by YHWH to go ahead of the people, take some of the elders with him, find a rock at Horeb, and strike it. Water came out of it. Action. (17:1-7)

In Matthew Jesus taunts the chief priests and elders, "*What do you think?*" he asks. And follows that question with the story of two sons – one says the right thing and then does nothing; the other says the wrong thing, but then acts as he was asked to do.

Jesus asks: *Which of the two did the will of his father?*

My Dad owned a restaurant while we were growing up – Marty's Famous Chicken, Ribs, & Seafood. One of the challenges of running a business that relies on the whims of the public is that sometimes your 'staff on hand vs. customers present' ratio gets out of whack. Often I would get a call at home asking me to come in because there was a rush of customers and only one person working the counter. The thing is, by the time I arrived, 99% of the time the rush was over and Dad would look at me sheepishly and say, "It's okay, you can go back home."

When Dad's call came in, I often didn't have a way to get there other than the bus that ran through our town begrudgingly every hour and a half. That bus took 45 minutes to get to the restaurant where I was most likely not going to be needed once I got there anyway. This was my argument with my Dad one of those nights when he called and insisted that I needed to get on the bus and get to the restaurant.

"No," I told him. "I'm not coming."

(I think I've mentioned before that I got fired about 8x by my Dad over the years.)

My determination to stay put lasted maybe about five minutes and then I ran to go and get the bus. No cell phones so Dad didn't know I was coming. 45 minutes later I walked into the door of a still crowded restaurant, hurriedly grabbed an apron, and my Dad just beamed. "I knew you'd come," he said.

I was writing up this illustration and I couldn't even imagine how it would have gone if I had done the reverse – said I would be there and then didn't go – I actually think I might not be here right now to tell this story.

The letter from the Apostle Paul to the Philippians approaches action a little differently. The majority of the text is called the Christ hymn. General consensus is that Paul pulled it from somewhere else. The first part focuses on the actions of Christ:

*he humbled himself
and became obedient to the point of death—
even death on a cross.*

The second part focuses on the actions of God:

*Therefore God also highly exalted him
and gave him the name
that is above every name,*

This in turn reminds us of what our action should be:

*so that at the name of Jesus
every knee should bend,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
and every tongue should confess
that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.*

Paul's letter continues:

...work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for God's good pleasure.

We are called to live in a way that allows others to see Christ in us. That's hard work. It's not a one and done. It's the repeated action of working out our own salvation with fear and trembling.

Being a Christian, allowing God to work in us, is a process. Sometimes we're going to be all fired up about working in the vineyard and we're going to run out of steam and decide that's not for

us after all. Sometimes we're going to think working in the vineyard is ridiculous and yet something will inspire us to give it a try, and we'll end up doing good work there anyway.

Being a Christian is a process:

Who is God calling you to be?

Who is God calling the church to be?

What is God calling you to do?

What is God calling the church to do?

Allowing God to work in us, exchanging our "I don't want to" for "I'll be right there," is a real call to behave differently and to be in relationship with God and one another in new ways.

Intentional Christian communities, from the early monastics to the people who are trying this way of life even now, have always intrigued me. Shane Claiborne is a founder of a group called The Simple Way. Some call these types of groups the "new monastics." They seem to prefer "ordinary radicals." In his book *The Irresistible Revolution*, Claiborne tells the story of what happened when a group of homeless people moved into an abandoned church in North Philadelphia. The group, mostly women with children, had been living together for some time in a shantytown of sorts nearby when they were run out by police. Having no place to go and wanting to stick together, they took shelter in an abandoned church. When the property owners discovered the women and children living there, they gave them 48 hours to get out.

Some of the students at the college Claiborne attended were becoming tuned in to issues of poverty and social justice, and they heard about what was going on. So they went to see what they could do to help. When they got to the church, they were confronted with a banner that read "How can we worship a homeless man on Sunday and ignore one on Monday?" Convinced by the sign and the people they met there, they decided they had to stand with these homeless women and children. They created a media spectacle with a bunch of middle class white kids hanging out with the homeless in North Philly. All kinds of civic and political leaders showed up to show their support. The 48 hours came and went.

It went on like that for a good while, with the college kids spending time at the church, organized with a cell phone and an air horn and a plan to mobilize quickly from campus to the church if the day came when officials showed up to evict the families. They got people to donate food and other necessities; they sang Tracy Chapman; they preached the words of the prophets; they felt the fervor of the Spirit like never before.

As these things often are, the movement was contagious. One night, really late, there was a knock at the church door. There were two firemen standing outside and everyone thought the time had come for the showdown. Instead, these two firemen had come under the cover of night to help. They had heard at the station that the fire marshal was going to come to the church the next day to inspect it and shut it down, citing code violations, and they had brought smoke detectors, fire alarms, and their expertise so that the building would not be in violation when the marshal arrived.

And so it went, with the students and the families together in this old church. They held Sunday services, they celebrated communion, and they prayed together. Eventually most of the families were able to find adequate housing, and a press conference was held, and things died down.

Claiborne concludes the story with these words: “We do indeed have a God of resurrection, a God who can create beauty from the messes we make of this world.”

Maybe it is just me wanting the world as it should be instead of as it actually is, but isn't it wonderful to imagine being a part of that kind of a community? A community that stands together in the name of Christ?

Today we gather around the table to receive the body and the cup as a community of faith. Christian community has its own greek word: *koinōnia*. *Koinōnia* is when believers in Christ come together in love, faith, and encouragement for one another. It's when Christians feed, visit, embrace, and speak truth fearlessly, obedient to Christ; opening ourselves to others needs, pains, and hopes.

That kind of challenge of community and Christianity definitely instills fear and trembling; and yet every day that we allow God to work in us, every day that we remember that our knee bends at the name of Jesus, every day that we confess Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God and allow God to work in us for God's good pleasure...

Every day we decide to go ahead and show up to work in the vineyard... is the best day.

In the name of the Creator, the Christ, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.