

The parable of two sons: a compelling story from Jesus.
 A man has two sons.
 He directs them both to work in the family vineyard.
 One declines, but eventually changes his mind and goes to work.
 The other promises to work, but never comes through.
 The punch line is clear, as is the case with many of Jesus' parables.

[SITr] "Which of the two did the will of his father?"

This is the bottom line.

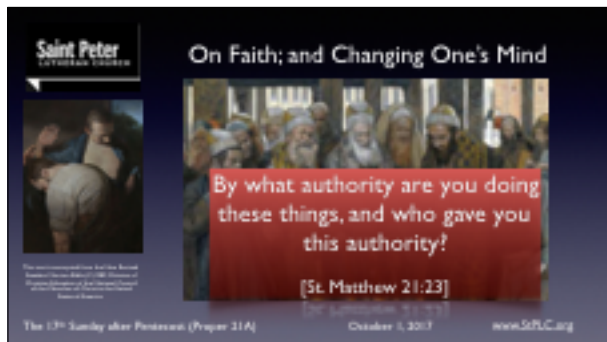
Promises don't get much done in a vineyard.

Action does.

The parable, taken by itself, seems to suggest that Jesus — perhaps even God — is more interested in what someone does, than what someone promises to do.

So be careful what you promise, right?

And be sure to follow through.



But the parables of Jesus are rarely meant to be taken by themselves — they have to be understood in context.
 This one is set in the conflict between Jesus and the religious officials of his day.

They approach him while he is teaching in the temple, and question him.

[SITr] "By what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?"

There is a divide between Jesus and these officials.

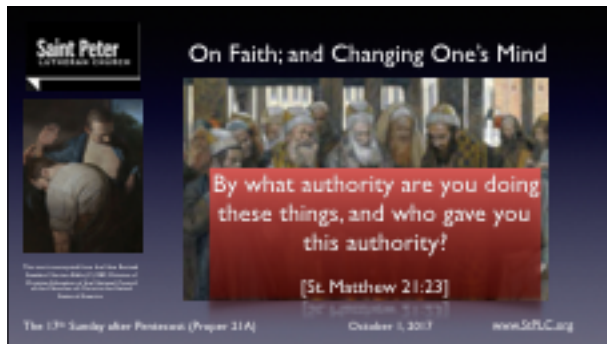
They are aware of the divide — dead certain that they are right and Jesus is wrong.

He is breaking the rules that guide their lives.

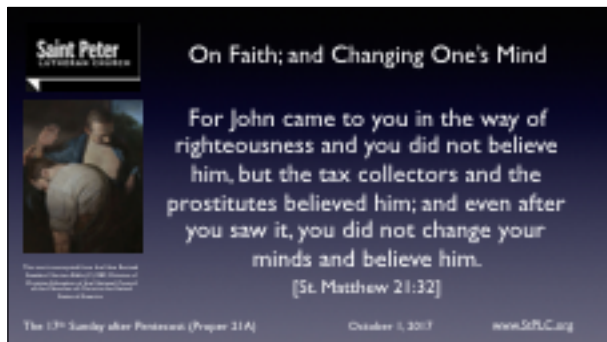
Healing and working wonders on the Sabbath.

Gathering and eating with all the wrong people.

His most recent offense: driving the money changers out of the temple.

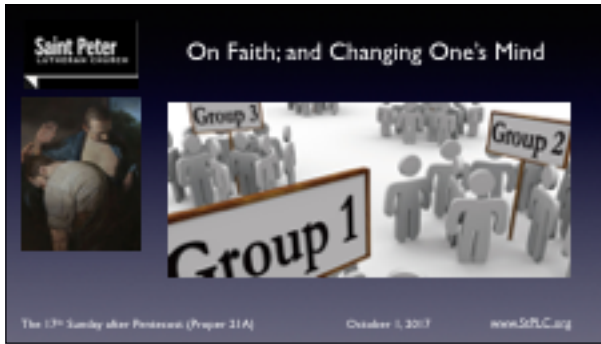


So they challenge him publicly.
 They are recognized religious officials in Jerusalem.
 He is just an upstart rabbi from Nazareth.
 They have power and authority, officially bestowed on them after years of working within the system.
 He shows up out of nowhere, with a small band of followers.
 Who is he to challenge them?
 Who is he to interpret the word of God in new ways?
 Who is he to question their wisdom and understanding?



Questioning them, of course, is exactly what Jesus is doing.
 At the end of the Gospel lesson, he puts it into perspective.
 He and John have come to change minds — to welcome people (leaders and followers alike) back to the heart of God.
 This is what their ministry is all about.
 The religious culture in Jerusalem has grown cold and unfaithful.
 Its leaders seem to care little for vulnerable members of their community.
 Traditions and customs seem to have more to do with filling the coffers than drawing worshippers nearer to God.
 These religious officials may look good on the outside — like the son who promises to work in the father's vineyard.
 But it is time for a change of mind — a change of heart.

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It's a hard message to hear.
 We know a little about that these days, don't we?
 It doesn't take a genius to recognize that we are living in sharply divided times.
 Whether it is politics or social norms or economic issues or race relations, we are often divided into opposing groups.
 When that happens, it seems the goal these days is to prove your commitment to a certain point of view.
 Convince other people with the same perspective that you are a true believer.
 Change your mind and you'll be branded a flip-flopper.
 We've seen that happen any number of times in recent years.

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So what do we do?
 We silo ourselves within our own perspective.
 We turn to the news media that share our point of view.
 We follow on social media those whose posts agree with our convictions.
 Over time we become more and more certain that what we believe is right — and anyone who disagrees is completely wrong.
 In doing so, we become much like the chief priests and the elders of the people in Jesus day.
 Passionately committed to our convictions.
 But resistant to new information, or new ways of understanding.



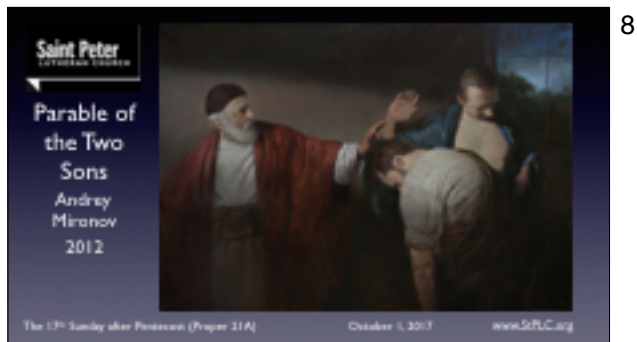
We talked about this at Catechism this past Friday night. The topic was Martin Luther and the Reformation. The question at hand was “What is Martin Luther’s gift to the church today?”

Truth is, Luther’s greatest contribution isn’t the creation of a new denomination with his name on it. It has more to do with the commitment to ask hard questions about cherished traditions and rituals and beliefs. And the willingness to change our minds when God calls us to do so.

This is not just the theme of what took place some five hundred years ago.

It is our continued commitment today, to be open to the challenges God sends us.

To be willing to change our minds if faithfulness demands it.



Ultimately, that’s the problem in today’s Gospel lesson. The chief priests and elders of the people are both certain and wrong.

God sends John to change their minds, and he is put to death. God sends Jesus to change their minds, and his authority is questioned.

These officials put on a good show — they look extraordinarily religious to the people of their time.

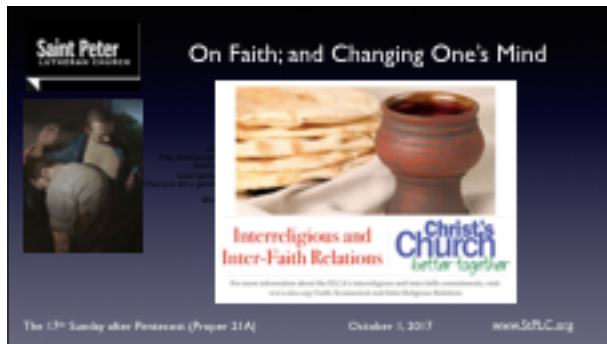
But their faith is all about appearances.

When John and Jesus point this out, they are unable (or perhaps unwilling) to see it.

So Jesus tells a story about a man and two sons. Only one of whom is open enough to change his mind, go in a new direction, and enter into the work of the father.

The religious officials of Jesus’ day are unable to do this.

The question is: are we?



This is an area where our Lutheran tradition has gifts to share. We trace our beginnings back 500 years to a significant change in mind about what it means to be church.

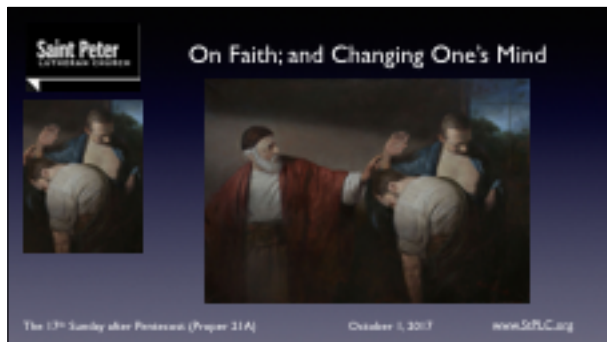
We strive to follow the lead of Martin Luther, and stay open to the need to change our minds about traditions and customs in our life together that no longer serve their original purpose.

This morning, during our “Christ’s Church; Better Together” segment, I’ll be featuring the ELCA’s inter-religious and inter-faith relationships.

I’m grateful to belong to a denomination that stays open to the insights and perspectives of others.

One that is willing to learn from other traditions.

And understand that God may well have taught them something that we haven’t yet been able to see.



This morning, as we reflect on these close minded first century religious officials,
And the two sons of the father; one of whom was able to change his mind and enter into the father’s work,

We ask ourselves:

How is God calling us to change our minds today?

In what ways does the message of Jesus draw us into a new way of being; a new way of thinking; a new way of believing?

How might our faith draw us out of our own prejudices and preconceived notions,

And into a faithfulness that is built on the power of God’s word, and the presence of Christ in our midst?

Despite what our culture might think, there are times when faithfulness has a lot to do with open-mindedness, learning from one another, and the willingness to be moved by God’s Spirit.

Saint Peter
LUTHERAN LITURGY

Take It Home!

Let's keep the conversation going. Our hosts will have a 7-day devotional guide for you as you leave today.

Question for this evening's conversation: "Why were the chief priests and the elders of the people reluctant to embrace John and Jesus?"

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As you leave today, our hosts have a 7-day devotional for you. Let's spend the next couple of days reflecting on this morning, and preparing ourselves for next Sunday.

Saint Peter
LUTHERAN LITURGY

The Last Word

I am not trying to prove that I am right. I am trying to find out whether or not I am right.

[Albert Einstein]

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It is said that after publishing his theory of relativity, a news reporter asked Albert Einstein what it was like to know the the brightest minds in the world were trying to prove that he was wrong.

He answered: "I am not trying to prove that I am right. I am trying to find out whether or not I am right."

That sounds like a faithful way to stay open to what God might teach us — and an effective way to honor the tradition that is ours as Lutherans.

Saint Peter
LUTHERAN LITURGY

Hymn of the Day

Please stand as we sing today's Hymn of the Day.

1st Service: *Lord, Whose Love in Humble Service* (page #27)

2nd Service: *All Hail the Power of Jesus Name* (page #26)

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Please stand with us as we sing today's Hymn of the Day.

1st Service: Lord, Whose Love in Humble Service (page #27)

2nd Service: All Hail the Power of Jesus Name (page #26)

Saint Peter
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St. Matthew 21:23-32

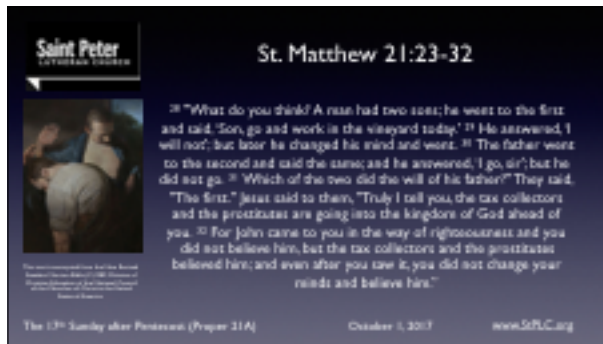
²¹⁻²³ When [Jesus] entered the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came to him as he was teaching, and said, "By what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?" ²⁴ Jesus said to them, "I will also ask you one question; if you tell me the answer, then I 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."

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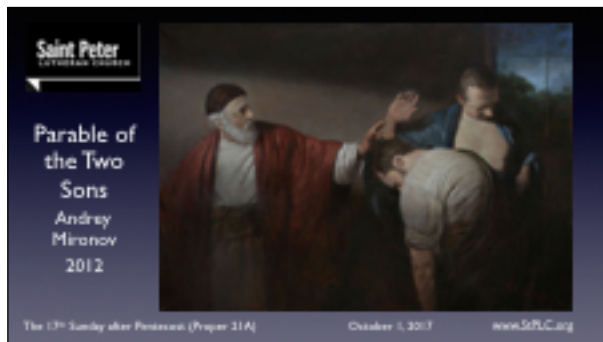
21:23 When [Jesus] entered the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came to him as he was teaching, and said, "By what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?" 24 Jesus said to them, "I will also ask you one question; if you tell me the answer, then I 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."

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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."

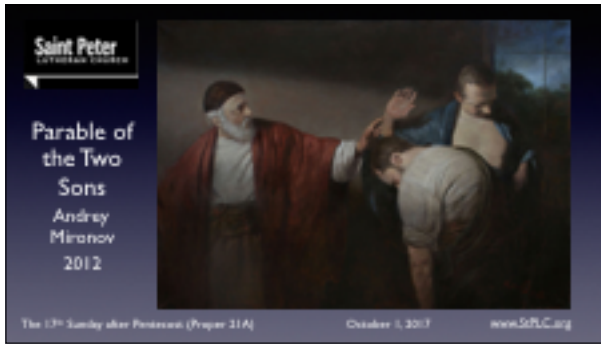
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Artist: Andrey Mironov

His father was a Soviet militia officer. Born in Ryazan, Andrei moved with his family to Ivdel (Sverdlovsk Oblast) in 1983. He graduated from a local secondary school in 1990 and in the same year he returned to his native city. One year later, he began to study at the PTU-3 in Ryazan. In the meantime, Mironov prepared himself to enter the Ryazan College of Art. However, because his conscription into the Russian Army, he received his diploma in industrial design before completing the full PTU program.

He took part in the First Chechen War. After the war, he chose the career of a militia officer.



Being self-educated in painting, he works a lot as a portraitist after 2005. Already in 2007, he won the title "Profi" at Russian Art Week in Moscow. Later he participates in many exhibitions and increases the number of his clients.

His participation in the First Chechen War as well as his police work has had a considerable influence on his artistic development. The artist defined Christianity as "the main theme of his oeuvre". Some critics compare the "strangeness" of his paintings with the impression of the old masters' works.

Today his paintings are found in private collections, in the Kashira local museum, in the Monastery of Our Lady of Kazan and in the St. Nicholas Church in Yamskaya Sloboda (Ryazan).

Since 2008 he is a member of the Moscow Union of Artists International Art Foundation.