

26th Sunday in Ordinary Time Cycle A

It's football season! If you're a student of college football trivia, you may have heard the story about the 1929 Rose Bowl. Georgia Tech was playing the University of California. In the first half of the game, a player recovered a fumbled ball but became confused and ran the wrong way. A teammate tackled him just in the nick of time - just before he would have scored a touchdown against his own team.

According to one account, at halftime all of the players went into the locker room and sat down, wondering what the coach would say. This young man sat by himself; put a towel over his head, and cried. When it was time for the second half, the coach stunned the team by announcing that the same players who had started the first half would start the second half. This included the player that had just run the wrong way.

All of the players left the locker room except for this young man. He would not budge. The coach looked back as he called him again and saw that his cheeks were wet with tears. The player said, "Coach, I can't do it. I've ruined you. I've disgraced the University. I can't face that crowd in the stadium again." Then the coach walked over to the young man, put his hand on his shoulder and said, "Get up and go back in. The game is only half over." That coach gave his player a 2nd chance that he, likely, never forgot.

In today's gospel, Jesus tells the parable of 2 sons who say one thing and do another. (You could hardly call either a model son.) Jesus told this parable in the Temple in Jerusalem, just days before they would arrest him and put him to death. For 3 years, he had been preaching to the people, inviting them to repent and believe the Good News. He had discovered, though, that it was the public sinners like the tax-collectors and prostitutes who responded to his call. Those who had truly messed up their lives, knew that they needed to change. They needed the 2nd chance that Jesus offered.

On the other hand the religious leaders, the Scribes and Pharisees, didn't see any need to change. After all, they had the answers and they were convinced that they were right.

In the parable, the father of the 2 sons represents God the Father. The parable likens the tax-collectors and prostitutes to the son who first said **no** but later did what the father wanted. It compares the Pharisees and Scribes to the son who enthusiastically said **yes** but did not follow through. In the parable, Jesus points to the importance of actions over words. The Pharisees and Scribes were all talk and no show.

When we listen to this Gospel, it is fairly evident which son is right, in the end, and which is wrong. Consider what the outcome might have been if you and I had been part of this story. Where might we fit into the parable? Are we the first son who said no but later had a change of heart OR the 2nd son who said “Yes” but did not follow through? Are we the Scribes and Pharisees with all the answers or the prostitutes and tax collectors looking for a second chance? Are we all about words but no show? How often have we said yes to God, with the best of intentions, and then didn’t follow through? How often have we run the wrong way?

It’s never too late to turn around. God always gives us another chance. Our God is a God of 2nd chances.

Deacon Gary Aitchison