

West Swing Matthew 21:28-32

Pastor Bill Mosley

Dave is awakened by a rat-a-tat-tat on the door. He rolls over and looks at his clock, and it's half past three in the morning. "I'm not getting out of bed," he thinks, and rolls over. Then, a louder knock follows. "Aren't you going to answer that?" says his wife. So Dave drags himself out of bed. He opens the door and there is a man standing on the porch. It didn't take the homeowner long to realize the man was drunk. "Hi there," slurs the stranger. "Can you give me a push??" "No, get lost. It's half past three. I was in bed," Dave shouts and slams the door. He goes back to bed and tells his wife what happened and she says, "Dave, that wasn't very nice of you. Remember that night we broke down in the pouring rain on the way to pick the kids up from the baby sitter and you had to knock at someone's house to get us started again? What would have happened if he'd told us to get lost??" "But the guy was drunk," says Dave.

"It doesn't matter," says the wife. "He needs our help and it would be the Christian thing to help him." So Dave gets out of bed again, gets dressed, and goes downstairs. He opens the door, and not being able to see the stranger anywhere he shouts, "Hey, do you still want a push??" And he hears a voice cry out, "Yeah please." So, still being unable to see the stranger he shouts, "Where are you?" And the stranger replies, "I'm over here, ***on your swing.***"

I'm glad Dave had a change of heart, but he needs to give his night caller a different kind of push. He too needs a change of heart.

Jesus tells the parable of the 2 sons. A man has 2 sons. One he tells to go to work, & the son says no, but later he does go. The other he tells to go, & he agrees, but doesn't. So which did his father's will? The first, the chief priests & Pharisees have to say.

And Jesus tells them: outward sinners like treacherous tax collectors and women of the night who believed John, were better than the self-righteous religious people who acted like they believed, but didn't.

The parable of the two sons is not all black & white. Neither one exactly fits the bill as the exemplary son. Except for this: the one who struggled with himself & his father's call upon him had the change of heart.

This is not a parable of example, where Jesus is saying, "Go & do thou likewise." This is a mirror parable. He's trying to show us something about us. What are we like? How do we deserve judgment? Well, he's actually speaking to the Pharisees here.

Pharisees were a part of Judaism that thought they could keep the whole law, & in trying to keep the whole law, it made them perfect, better than anyone else. But in keeping the letter of the law, they missed out on faith, & forgiveness, & humility, & most of all, joy in the Lord.

I think if Jesus were telling this parable today, there would be a third son. The 3rd son would say, "Sure, Father, anything you say, I'm yours to command." But then he would grumble and complain all day, swearing under his breath, and plotting to get vengeance on his father and brothers when they are old and weak, or when he has somehow turned the tables on them.

I know because that was my attitude whenever my father made me do something I didn't like. I got vengeance all right. I didn't go to Texas A&M like I was supposed to!

The truth in this parable is that human nature is devious, & we want to believe what we want to believe, & that is that we can be our own God & we don't need God to tell us what to do. Do the things God says? Sacrifice our good times?

The NBC series *West Wing* had a great premise. Good folks coping with less than good lives while working in the White House. We had a President, played by Martin Sheen, who tells stories like Lincoln and has a terrible illness, like FDR (who is prominently mentioned so that we would have that comparison in our minds).

In the first episode, back in 1999, POTUS, for the initials of "President of the United States," does not appear until the last sequence of scenes. But the first thing he does is quote the First Commandment,

and the first problem he solves is to call certain religious leaders to obey it. He even states that he has read his Bible from cover to cover. But that doesn't prove anything; we know from scripture that even the devil can quote scripture.

But more to the point for our worship today is the sub-plot of the premier episode of *West Wing*. It's not just fiction, it's true-to-life. This actually does happen & so frequently that the news people hardly report it anymore.

POTUS tells his staff that 1200 Cubans left their island on makeshift rafts to try to get to America. Once on the ocean, 700 turned back because of bad weather, and we can only guess what will happen to them back in Cuba. 350 are missing and presumed dead. 137 are in custody and seeking asylum from the United States Government.

"The ones that didn't die want a better life and they want it here," POTUS says. He reminds his staff that this better life is what America is all about, and they are in business to see that it is available, that the vision of freedom comes to life, now get back to work.

People risk their lives to live here. It's that important to them.

How do we feel about what we are doing here in our worship today? Would you risk your life on a raft to be here right now? Is the First Commandment really your First Commandment -- that there is nothing higher or more important to you than God?

What would you sacrifice for God? Would you risk a friendship by telling your friends how important God in Christ is to you? Would you risk a little embarrassment to actually take part in leading worship?

Would you give up some time to volunteer to help with the church's programs, ministries, and upkeep? Not for me, or the church, or any one person, but for God?

Would you give up your own first place in your life to let God lead you in ways you haven't thought of before? To renew your life and live?

I hope you answered "Yes" to these questions. Now the question is, what do you do **tomorrow**? About how you answered these questions? Do you say yes, and go and not do it, or do you say no and then maybe do it? Do you say Yes and be mad at God?

Or do you say yes, & do it with JOY? Do you talk the talk & walk the walk?

Lord, give us the JOY to say no to everything that makes it more difficult to say yes to you.