

Rev. Mike Cole
Providence Presbyterian Church
26th Sunday in Ordinary Time
September 27, 2026
Philippians 2:1-13; Matthew 21:23-32

"Just Do It"

"Because I said so!" How many times did we hear that when we were growing up? How many times have we said it to our children? When I was a kid, I hated hearing that and I vowed never to say that to my son. You can check with Colin and he will tell you that I broke my vow..... often. I said it to him just like my parents said it to me and their parents said it to them. I wouldn't be at all surprised if Adam and Eve said it to Cain and Abel.

Those in power want those who are subordinate to do what they say. Isn't it interesting that we say, "Because I said so," not "because I did so?" Hmmm That's because we don't always do what we say or say what we do. The dilemma of saying one thing and doing another is the crux of the parable Jesus told in today's lesson.

"What do you think about this," said Jesus? "A man took his two sons to a "Father-Son" baseball game with several neighbor men and their sons. During the seventh inning stretch, with the home team winning, the man asked the oldest son to mow the lawn when he got home. The older boy flat out refused, while the father's friends turned away in embarrassment. Then the man turned to his younger son and asked the same question: "Would you mow the lawn when we get home?" To his relief, his younger boy readily agreed.

After all the men and their sons got home from the game, they noticed that the older boy who said, "no," was mowing the lawn. The younger boy who said, "yes," was off playing with his friends. "Now which of these two boys did the will of their father," said Jesus - the older boy who said, "No," but then mowed the lawn, or the younger boy who said, "Yes," but didn't mow the lawn?"

Almost without hesitation, the Pharisees said, like most of us would say, "Obviously, the older boy **did** his father's will. After all, what we **do** is more important than what we **say**, isn't it? Doesn't scripture say, "Be ye doers of the word and not hearers only?"

We understand doing because that's us, through and through. We Presbyterians are doers. We are regular attenders and pledgers - those who not only hear the word, but who

on many occasions can be counted on to do the word. So, it pleases us to think of ourselves as doing the Word of God.

On the other hand, we Presbyterians are pretty quiet about our faith. You won't see many of us on street corners or in tent-meetings publicly proclaiming our faith and exhorting others to follow Christ. We're the quiet movers, shakers and doers of the word. So what if we don't always say, "Yes" at first? Sometimes it's necessary to examine things carefully before committing - maybe form a committee to study the request first. But once we decide to do something, watch out! It'll get done. Yep, the older boy definitely did the will of his father - at least better than his irresponsible younger brother.

On the third hand, think of the public shame the father had to endure because the older son was so negative. That had to have hurt the father to be humiliated in front of his friends, especially when he was treating his son to a great baseball game. The insolence of the older boy sets a terrible example. So, saying that the older boy did the will of his father doesn't seem quite like the right answer.

On the fourth hand, the younger boy didn't humiliate his father publicly. Perhaps he even had the best of intentions. Maybe he really did mean to mow the lawn, but other things out of his control came up. We've certainly been there, before. There have been times when we said, "Yes," before we checked our schedules or before we thought better of it. Surely, the father would take extenuating circumstances into account.

On the fourth hand, the younger boy didn't **do** what his father wanted, he only said what the father wanted to hear. That can't be right either.

So, why would Jesus ask a question that seems to have only two answers, neither of which is right? This is Jesus' way. The Gospels tell us that Jesus asked 307 questions during his ministry. He was asked 183 questions but only directly answered 3. Jesus used questions to get us to do our own thinking. Jesus often posed a hypothetical situation to draw us to a conclusion we've never considered.

We can't see the obvious answer because we get so wrapped up in justifying ourselves before God. We know ourselves well enough to know that we don't always say and do the same things. Sometimes we say one thing and do another. But we don't want to get caught by the judgment of God, so we rationalize why our words and deeds don't match.

The thing is that we don't have to justify ourselves before God - He has already done that in Jesus Christ. He has already made things right for us through Jesus Christ. When we type on a computer one option is to select "justified margins," meaning to set the right and left margins so that the first or last letter of each line are vertically aligned.

That's what Jesus accomplished for us on the cross. He took away all the mis-aligned letters of our lives and lined them up perfectly with God. Jesus justified us before God so

that we don't need to justify ourselves. If we don't need to justify ourselves before God, if God is willing to overlook the times we say one thing and do another, we can see that the real answer to Jesus' question is that neither son did the will of their father.

Jesus is trying to get us to see that neither saying, "Yes," and not doing what we say, nor saying "No," and doing what we said no to is the way to honor God. Saying, "Yes," and doing what we say is the best way to honor God. That is what we strive for - to say, "Yes," and then do what we say.

As followers of Jesus Christ our beliefs and our deeds need to match. When we speak but do not act accordingly or when we act but do not speak accordingly, then we are not doing God's will. But that does not mean that we are outcasts in the kingdom of God, because God sent Jesus to make up for what we lack - whether we are faithful speakers and unfaithful doers, or unfaithful speakers and faithful doers - Jesus stands in for us. The message of this parable is not that we are doomed if we don't do what we say and say what we do.

The message of this parable is twofold: First, it helps us understand that Christian discipleship means honoring God by saying what we believe and doing it; Second, it assures us that when our words and deeds don't match Jesus will make up the difference. That makes it possible for all of us imperfect sayers and doers to live as obediently as we can in this imperfect community called the church.

Last Monday at the Bible Study we discussed how this parable applies to our church. We noted that we do our best to say what we do and do what we say. We see the effects of our efforts every day. All our new members and friends say the same thing when asked what attracted them to return to Providence. They say "Because I felt welcome. The people here really care about one another and show their warmth and hospitality to everyone." I've said it before and I will say it again: God is up to something special with us and I am so proud of our congregation for being known as a warm and welcoming place.

When we put our faith into practice, we say what we do and do what we say, so that when God says, "Because I said so," we are ready to follow where God leads. In the end, we are called not just to say it but also to just do it.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

The Charge: Wherever you go, God is sending you. Wherever you are, God will equip you. God will accomplish a purpose in your being there. Christ who dwells within you has something He wants to do through you where you are. Believe this and go in God's grace, love and power. Amen