

Ordinary A 26 September 27, 2026

Two sons, one truculent and quarrelsome, yet in the end he does what is right; the other, compliant and agreeable, but he never follows through on his promise.

A simple story. And we all identify with one, or even both of these characters.

And then what? How is this story good news, a new revelation of God's love for us?

First, notice that it's not just about the two sons; it's really about the parent.

A wise woman once noted that the decision to become a parent is momentous. It is to decide to have your heart walk around outside your body, forever.

The parent who sends the boys to work in the vineyard is not a drill Sergeant or a foreman; he is a father. And he remains a father to both boys, regardless of their behavior.

The brother who repents is not suddenly restored from outcast to son; he was always beloved.

And the brother who finally does not go always remains dear child to this father.

But in this parable, the parent's love consists in more than just an unconditional acceptance of these two sons.

That parental love started long before, in obtaining the vineyard for the family, tending it for long hours when the sons were too young to work, and harvesting its crops to support them.

This parent demonstrated that love by teaching the sons how to work the vineyard, how to care for the plants, how to read the weather and the soil and the vines.

And even the very act of sending the sons to work in the vineyard demonstrated love. By this, the father invited them into his own world, and expressed his confidence in them, and gave them a share in the responsibility for the family's livelihood. The father's love suffused every moment of their lives, most especially when the sons had scarce recognition of it.

We don't know why the boys acted as they did; but we can guess, since their motivations arise in our own hearts.

Perhaps one son thought it easier to keep the old man happy and avoid a fight; or maybe he really intended to go but got lazy or preoccupied.

Maybe he simply didn't have the capacity to mean what he said, to keep his word. You know, we all have experiences, but insight is optional.

Maybe the other son repented because he felt guilty, or feared he would be disciplined, or maybe he finally remembered how much his father loved him. Maybe all the motives were at work. They often are in our own hearts.

No matter what the possibilities in the story, only one motive operates in the real world of our Father, who, as Pope John Paul I noted, is even more our Mother: unconditional, creative, expansive love.

God created the world for us, for our good, for our sustenance and delight. And God prepared it for us in myriad ways that we scarcely know: the people God sent into our lives, the talents God bestowed, God's own Holy Spirit dwelling in us.

And because God loves us, God has given us a share in that same divine, creative work, as stewards of the earth's goodness and co-creators of the Kingdom of God.

But as parents know, love may be priceless, but it is not costless.

Very often that love has come to us, uncomfortably, as a demand we would rather not heed, a call we would rather not hear, a limitation we would rather not endure, a suffering we would rather not undergo.

Yet even the cost of the mission, working in the vineyard, expresses God's love, God's confidence in us, God's invitation to grow up and join in God's own laboring for the coming Kingdom. That same selflessness marks, not the hireling but the family member.

And when we become rooted in the divine life of God dwelling within us, we focus our hearts on our deepest desire, union with our God. We answer the call, we say “yes” and we go.

How do we come to know that love? Through the teller of this tale, the preacher of this parable.

For ours is not just a story of two brothers. Ours most especially is the story of the third brother, Jesus, the uniquely Begotten Child of God, who shares His own Spirit and life with us, so that He might be the first of many brothers and sisters.

In Jesus, the Sacred Heart of God walks around outside the Father's body, if you will, forever.

In Jesus, God takes the initiative in paying that cost for us.

When we were trapped by our obstinance and infidelity, the Father sent another Son to the vineyard.

When sent, He said “yes,” and His word became deed, for he was not “yes” and “no,” He was only “Amen,” “Yes,” “Let Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”

The only tools Jesus brought to the vineyard were humility, poverty, and obedience. He did not deem his equality with God something to be clung to, but emptied himself, becoming our slave.

And rather than destroy His enemies, us, He accepted death on a cross, to break our hearts and turn us toward the Father again.

These are the tools that bring forth the harvest of life in the vineyard, and they are the tools his brothers and sisters need now if we are to live as children of God.

Our God, who is Father and Mother, calls us to work in the vineyard because that same God has already called us out of the death of sin into the life of the Beloved One.

God invites us into the vineyard to work with our eldest brother, Jesus, to bring life to one another, to share the harvest, to forge the new family of God.

God seeks to bestow on us the same tools of the Son: humility, simplicity of life, obedience to the Spirit, compassion, joy, love.

That's why He summons us, each day, each week, to this banquet of Word and Eucharist.

Here, He opens our ears to listen to His call ever more clearly;

here He stretches open our hands and our hearts to respond ever more generously;

here He shepherds us deeper into the community of beloved children of our Father-Mother God, deeper into the very heart of the Triune God;

here, Jesus sits us at our truest family table, to nourish us with the Bread of Life and the Fruit of the Vine, until at last He will gather us into the eternal banquet, the Supper of the Lamb.

We pray that each of us and each of our sisters and brothers will continue to say yes to that invitation.

And we trust that, in the life-giving power of the Holy Spirit, each day our word will become deed and our deeds will proclaim to the glory of God the Father that Jesus Christ is Lord.

And the people of God said Amen.