

Before high school and college sporting events, they often hold a pep rally. The purpose of such a pep rally is to get students excited and pumped up to cheer their team on for the upcoming game. Pep rallies are usually held the day before a game, or at least the afternoon before the game begins. That means that the enthusiasm which has been worked up in the fans has a chance to die down or even dissipate before the game even begins. Some of the people at the pep rally may not even go to the game. Some will let their enthusiasm wane, while others will still be pumped up for the game when it finally begins. Today, we are having a mission festival theme, and there are many similarities between what we do here in church today and a pep rally. We will probably get excited for mission work. We will be reminded of what our Savior has done for us. We will be reminded that He wants us to take this message to others all over this world. But what will happen when we leave the church this morning? Will the enthusiasm which fills our hearts now at church remain with us, or will it cool off or even get forgotten after we leave? Before us this morning is a parable which speaks to how we respond to God's command to go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation. Let us take a closer look at His command, GO AND WORK. In response, 1) Words come from the mouth, but 2) Actions come from the heart.

As Jesus tells the parable, there is urgency to the work He gives to us. **“There was a man who had two sons. He went to the first and said, ‘Son, go and work today in the vineyard.’”** (28) A farmer knows that much of the work must be done at the proper time. There is not a lot of room for delay. So the father goes to his sons and tells them to go into the vineyard and get to work today. There also is urgency to the work which our Father has also given to us. Jesus Himself reminds us: *“As long as it is day, we must do the work of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work.”* (John 9:4)

Notice that our God is the One Who takes the initiative. He is the One Who comes to us with His love and forgiveness, and then He is also the One Who gives us the commission to share this message of His love with others. In the parable, the father is speaking to his sons, not to his servants. Ours is always the response to God's love and forgiveness. First, we are to receive the loving forgiveness offered to us, knowing that we have been made His holy children. Then we are to respond to His request to share that love with others by working in His kingdom.

The sons gave two very different responses to the father's request. The first son, in an almost disrespectful voice, replied, “I don't want to!” or even, “I will not!” It almost surprises us to hear a son speak to his father in this way. The second son replies in the way which we expect. **“I will, sir.”** (30) Notice the respect in his voice, responding to his father's wishes just as the father would like.

From the two responses we get a very distinct impression about each of the sons. We have almost disgust for the first son, who outright refused his father's request. But we have admiration for the second son who quickly responded by saying he would do what his father asked.

On this mission Sunday, we know that our heavenly Father has come to us and given us work to do as well. *“Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation.”* (Mark 16:15) There is urgency in the work which He has given to us, for the souls of men are dying in unbelief. So which of the two sons are we? Are we like the first son, who absolutely refuses to do what the Father has asked? Do we have our varied excuses on why we cannot do what is requested of us? Are we so firm in our conviction that nothing is going to change our minds? That is not what our Father expects of us.

Or are we like the second son, who hears our Father's call, and respond that we will carry out the task which He has given to us in this life? Do we recognize the urgency and the importance of sharing this wonderful good news with those around us in our community, as well as in the whole world in which we live? How it pleases our Father to have us respond gladly and willingly, “Here am I! Send Me!”

But that is not the end of the parable, is it? Jesus wants us to know that words and actions do not always follow in the way that we expect. Jesus tells us that the first son, who refused to go to work when his

father asked him to, repented — changed his mind — and did go to do what his father had asked. He must have realized that what he had said was wrong. This is also what our Savior wants to happen to sinners when they hear of His love and forgiveness for their sins — He wants them to change their minds about their actions, and come to Him for the salvation which He has so freely won for them.

However, the second son, who seemed so eager to follow his father's directive, did not go and do the work which he said that he was going to do. His inactivity spoke much louder than the correct words which came out of his mouth.

So Jesus asked, **“Which of the two did what his father wanted?”** (31) We might be inclined to answer that it was neither of them. But Jesus' question was which of the two sons actually did do what the father asked, which was to go and work in the vineyard. The answer to that question, obviously, is the first son, who originally said that he would not go, but did. Even though his first reaction was not appropriate, he finally did do what he was asked to do. However, the son who spoke the correct words, did not do what he had been asked to do.

Jesus applied this parable to the leaders of the church of His day. He said that the sinners, the tax collectors and the prostitutes, were recognizing their sinfulness, and repenting of their sins, and so were entering the kingdom of heaven. Jesus had come to wash away the sins of all people, even the worst of sinners. They were receiving what Jesus had won for them even though they had not lived the type of life which Jesus would have wanted.

However, those who knew better, those who knew what God had said in His Word, were saying many of the right things with their mouths, but were not repenting of their sins and receiving the forgiveness which Jesus had won for them. Even when they saw how Jesus loved sinners, and pronounced them cleansed of their sins, they did not look at themselves and realize that they needed the same forgiveness.

Today we are to look at ourselves and see which group we fall into. Do we cling so much to our doctrinal correctness, saying all of the right things, but we fail to put them into practice in our lives? Even when we see the wonderful blessings which our Lord has lavished upon others who have just heard of the forgiveness which is theirs, does that not make us stop and consider what blessings we already enjoy, but may not fully appreciate? We have this wonderful church building. We have this loving church family. We have the privilege to gather to study His Word each week. Do we take it for granted?

Do we look for ways of sharing these blessings with others? We can do that with our mouths, by telling those around us what wonderful blessings are theirs in Jesus. But that is not the only way of spreading this good news. We have our mission offerings which we can bring to the Lord each week. Those offerings are used to send missionaries to places where we cannot go ourselves. So they go in our name and carry out the work for us. We can use the savings which we have in a bank, placing it on deposit with our CEF (Church Extension Fund). That money remains ours, but while we are saving it, it is being loaned to mission congregations to buy land and build their worship facilities.

One last thing that each one of us is able to do, and that is to pray. Ask the Lord of the harvest to send forth workers into His vineyard while it is still day, so that many more may enter His kingdom with us. We pray for this in the Lord's prayer each time we ask, “Thy kingdom come.” May He rule in our hearts through faith, and then use us to bring that same kingdom and blessings to many others as well.

A pep rally gets everyone excited for the upcoming game. But not everyone goes to the game or cheers as enthusiastically during the game. Our mission service today might be compared to a pep rally. Are we going to be like the second son, and say the correct words about doing mission work, but then not actually do anything. Or are we going to recognize our failings, like the first son, and repent and go to do the work which our Savior has asked of us. Our Lord has given us all a mission, to go and work for Him. May we eagerly carry out that work in whatever way the Lord has blessed us.