

GO AND WORK IN MY VINEYARD TODAY

Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost

September 27, 2026

The man told his sons; “go and work in the vineyard today.” Now, I know nothing about growing grapes, however, my father’s family knew a thing or two about sugar beets. My great grandfather Joe Hudson and his family left their home to head west in a covered wagon for a better life. They made their way across southern Nebraska, eventually homesteading in Wheatland Wyoming. My grandfather Hallie Hill Hudson was born on the trail. He and his wife and children were sugar beet farmers in Wyoming; and suffice it to say, my dad didn’t take to farm life. In this way he was much like the sons in Jesus’ story today.

But before I get into the story, we need to understand why Jesus chose that story on that day. At the time, he was teaching the people in the Temple courts in Jerusalem. That in itself was not unusual; for there were many teachers teaching at the Temple on any given day. And they were all well known, except for Jesus.

The Chief Priests and elders had the responsibility of overseeing all that went on at the Temple; all the teaching and all the work. They suddenly focused their attention on Jesus; the one unfamiliar teacher; watching him; listening to everything he was saying. They could tell that Jesus was an outsider. He had the distinct appearance of a Galilean. And he spoke with such confidence and authority; unlike the other teachers who had been trained to quote from the various Rabbi’s as their authority. Unlike all of them; Jesus seemed to speak in his own authority.

The Chief Priests and elders knew that Jesus was not a Rabbi, not from the ordained clergy. And as a layman, he didn't even hold the requisite diocesan Lay Preachers License. And more maddening still, for someone who was so obviously a simple commoner, Jesus was drawing larger crowds than all the other authorized teachers present. And many of the people listening to Jesus were from lower social classes and even a few were Jewish outcasts. Well, these priests and elders had finally seen and heard enough. They quickly walked up to Jesus, upset, demanding to know by what authority he was teaching.

As Jesus looked at these faithful devout religious men, he knew that they were not ready to hear his answer; not open to hear the truth; they seemed to be clearly unwilling and incapable of hearing plainly where Jesus' authority came from. And this saddened Jesus; the truth of it broke his heart; seeing these Priests and Elders so blind. And as religious leaders they were responsible for teaching and guiding the Jewish people. And in their blindness, they were leading many Jewish people into the same dark pit they had fallen in themselves. And this angered Jesus; seeing his Jewish brethren being led astray. So, he decided to speak to these leaders by way of a parable; to tell them a story; to shine the light of God's truth on their blindness and hypocrisy and the error of their ways.

Jesus said to them: "A man had two sons; he went to the first and said, 'Son, go and work in the vineyard today.' He answered, 'I will not,' but later he changed his mind and went. The father went to the second and said the same, and he answered, 'I go, sir,' but he did not go. Which of the two did the will of his father? They said, 'The first.'" Jesus was setting a trap for these religious men, and they didn't even know it.

His story spoke of a man who had a vineyard and two sons; the first son disobeyed his father by refusing to go out and work in the vineyard; while the second son obeyed his father by saying that he would go and work. The man in the story; the father; represented God. God had called his two sons to work in his vineyard. So, what does this vineyard represent? It represented the kingdom of God; the reign of God; that realm where God is clearly seen and known, and God's will is being done.

Jesus had received his inspiration for this story from the Hebrew scriptures; from the prophet Isaiah, who spoke poetically and passionately in chapter five of his lover God who had a vineyard. He wrote: "I will sing to my love—a song to my lover about his vineyard. My love had a vineyard on a fertile hill." The lover in this lusty ancient story is our loving God who had a vineyard on a very fertile hill. It was a vast vineyard, encompassing the entire world. God's vineyard is God's kingdom; God's reign. And God had prepared this vineyard; this kingdom, so that it would easily flourish and yield a rich and fruitful abundant crop of souls.

Meanwhile, back in the Gospel story, the Father sent his two sons out into that same vineyard of God's reign, to raise a fruitful harvest. The first son, who refused to go into the vineyard, later changed his mind and went, while the second son, who initially agreed to go, later refused to do so. Jesus asked the priests and elders: "Which of the two [sons] did the will of his father?" And of course they said; the first son; thereby snaring them in Jesus' trap. It was obvious that the first son who ultimately obeyed his father was doing the will of his father, while the second son ultimately disobeyed his father.

Then Jesus spoke his final shocking words to these religious leaders, revealing his trap: "Truly I tell you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are

going into the kingdom of God ahead of you. For John came to you in the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes believed him, and even after you saw it you did not change your minds and believe him.” The first son who eventually obeyed his father were the tax collectors and prostitutes, while these devout religious men were identified with the second disobedient son. The first, working in the vineyard; in the reign of God, while these priests and elders apparently had refused to go and work. Although working at God’s Temple, they had apparently according to Jesus, rejected what was truly God’s work; God’s reign; because they were blind and unwilling to expand their vision beyond the tight social and religious boundaries of the Jewish Law and civil social status structure. They were unwilling to believe that God would ever be willing to welcome in the outcasts of society and the Gentiles with their strange religious and cultural beliefs.

These Chief Priests and Elders who daily faithfully engaged in religious hard work on behalf of the Temple, thought that they were working on behalf of God and for God’s kingdom. But they were in grave error. Because instead of their work bringing people closer to God and into greater spiritual light and freedom, they were instead placing heavier and heavier burdens of guilt and moral codes on the people’s shoulders that they could never bear; weighing them down with an impossible weight of legal religious Law.

The burden they were placing on the people relates to Isaiah’s passage where our lover God’s vineyard was supposed to yield the sweet grapes of love and unity and freedom and righteousness and justice. But instead, God said this about God’s vineyard: “When I expected my vineyard to yield sweet grapes, why did it yield rotten grapes?” Shockingly the vineyard of our lover God was yielding not the sweet grapes of love and unity and

freedom and righteousness and justice, but the rotten grapes of shame and oppression and animosity and separation and division.

Jesus was telling these Chief Priests and Jewish Elders that their hard faithful religious work was misguided; thereby leading the people down a dark path. Instead of working on behalf of God's reign and God's will; they were in fact working against it.

Sadly, the misguided work of these blind priests and elders has been multiplied over the years, as other priests and ministers and elders from various faith traditions have raised rotten grapes as well. Jesus has called you and me as God's children, to go and work in God's vineyard; to work on behalf of the reign of God; to raise the sweet grapes of love and unity and freedom and justice for all people. Go and work in my vineyard today.