

I would like to start by asking a question. “Who did Jesus come to save?”

We know the answer, but we often limit the scope of our real answer. The words flow easily off our tongues, “Jesus came to save sinners.” “He came to free us from the burden of sin.” “He came to save ALL sinners.”

We don’t say it out loud, but in our heart of hearts we are thinking that Jesus saved ME. He saved MY family, and all those I love (even my brother-in-law about whom I have some doubts, but definitely his kids, MY nieces and nephews).

It’s only natural to consider how something applies to us. When we hear a presentation on any subject, it usually comes down to “how does that affect me?” We all want to know what we get out of “it” whatever the “it” may be.

This might seem like harsh criticism, and I admit I don’t know each of your motives, but I do include myself in this accusation. We are selfish - some of us more so than others. We usually have OUR best interests at heart, and that applies to our response to God and to our hopes for eternity. We rejoice that Jesus has saved US. We figure it’s nice that He has saved others as well, but we really want to be sure that Jesus saved ME; that He saved MOM & DAD; that He saved x, y or z, you fill in the blank. The scale on which we appreciate this true gift from God is limited by our own experience, and it’s understandable. Remember that being saved is a gift from God, not something we have earned!

The forgotten person, or persons, in all of this is the **other guy**: the stranger; the people we don’t know and will never meet; the people we don’t

like; and finally the bad guys, the ones we have heard about in the news or in our study of history.

The difficult truth is that Jesus came to save all of those people, including each one of us, as well as the bad, the very bad, and most surprisingly, the unimaginably bad people. I doubt that any one of us is so headstrong that we would say “if so-and-so is in heaven, then I don’t want to go! I imagine, however, when we get there, that we’ll be surprised by some who we will encounter there, maybe even that mean teacher from the third grade!

I am reminded of a joke told by Groucho Marx to the effect that if a certain club or organization offered him membership he wouldn’t accept because any organization willing to have him as a member wasn’t exclusive enough for him! On the other hand there is God’s Kingdom which is wide open; a great and large family; and we are part of it. So, too are the rest of the people in the world by invitation from God Himself.

We can’t get into this family by hard work or doing the right stuff. We already belong. What we can do is be grateful and nurture our faith and the faith of our family and friends, so that we persist and enjoy the journey.

That’s the message of this parable today. God has invited us into His vineyard, His Kingdom, and we will all receive the greatest reward possible, union with Him in ways that we cannot begin to imagine. It is up to us to accept His invitation; to join the family and, like a good family member, participate in the life of the family, at the baptisms and funerals; at the weddings and the times of sorrow; during good times and the not-so-good times. The great generosity

described by this parable is that no matter when we get on board we get to enjoy membership fully.

That almost sounds too easy doesn't it? Well, as we know from our own lives and our own families, it sounds easier than it really is. Each one of us have egos, we have feelings, we're sinners after all, and we expect to be treated fairly. That's the word we trip over a lot of the time in families - fairness. We hear it from our children, from our sisters and brothers, we say it ourselves; and we know that it's a trap.

The older son in the story of the prodigal son expressed his displeasure when the father so graciously and joyfully welcomed back the prodigal son, his brother. We have felt it in real life when the dark sheep family member, or our lazy brother or sister, shows up and is treated well even though he or she has stayed away and let US do all the work tending to the family. The workers who started the day in the vineyard felt it in this parable and said as much when the wages were handed out.

We can be so easily distracted, thinking in our practical way, that there is only so much love and we deserve our fair share. We figure that if you turned your back, bad on you. You had your chance. We can't even begin to imagine that God has so much love that He will never run out - that there's more than enough for everyone who has ever lived!

Jesus reminds us that God's ways are different. They were different for the Jewish people in the time of the Old Testament, they were different in the time of Jesus, and they are different now. It's not up to us to judge others, or to limit access to God, or to grab as much as we can to be sure that we individually are

saved. God's ways are not the ways of men. Jesus told His disciples that on many occasions and it needs to be repeated over and over for us.

Instead of being disappointed, or upset, or even surprised, God expects us to rejoice with Him when even "the wicked and the scoundrel", to borrow terms from the first reading, turn toward God and make it to the presence of God, hopefully with us. I myself wonder if it isn't one of those further tests of our grasp of God's love whether we can let go of our fear and insecurity and place our trust in God. Really place our trust in Him, by turning away from all those things we hold onto so tightly. Have you ever observed a young child hold on tightly to a toy until he falls – then all he/she wants is Mom and the toy is dropped and forgotten. Is God waiting for us to let go of what we think is important and reach our hands out to Him? Then in a final test to demonstrate that we get it, is God waiting for us to reach our hand out to others, especially the others we didn't think were worthy of either God's love or our own?

Paul describes an interesting dilemma as he sits in prison and writes to the Philippians. He almost sounds like he welcomes death so that he can be with Christ for all eternity. But he realizes he has much work to do for Christ. The good thing for Paul is that he is happy either way, if he lives or if he dies. That is a man of faith and confidence. He has let go of the distractions of this world. He is confident that he has been faithful to the God who forgave him and loves him; he embraces his work bringing the Gospel to others, carrying on the work to which he was called by his savior. We can learn from Paul. We can learn from Jesus through the words of Matthew. We can learn from the prophets. But to do so we

have to let go of what the world tells us and immerse ourselves in God's kingdom. The truth is that God's kingdom is opposed by the kingdoms of our creation.

I know you are going to hear from Jan Pou later today about the Ministries Fair that you might have noticed on the way in and hopefully will look more closely at on your way out. Ministries can be like the vineyard in today's Gospel. Some of the potential laborers were just standing around. The landowner asked them why they were idle. The answer was that no one had invited them to work. In the time of Jesus a job was a gift; only those who were invited got to participate and then also to participate in the results, either by sharing in the harvest or by being paid a wage. Consider this one of several invitations to look more closely at the various ministries that enrich the life of our church, and to participate as fully as you can. Usually there are no contracts, no terms of service like a cell phone contract. We invite you to prayerfully consider whether your participation in the family of God would be enriched, enhanced, or made more enjoyable by participation in one or more of the ministries that make St. Joseph special.