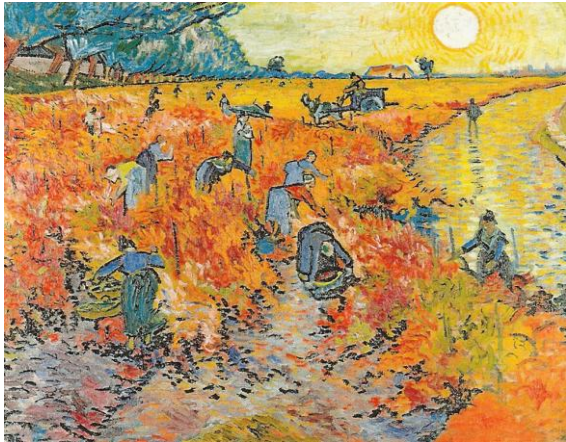


Sunday, September 27, 2020
Pentecost 17
Grace Lutheran Church
Somers Point, NJ 08244
Interim Pastor: Rev. Kevin Hilgendorf
“The Third Son Said and Did It”



Talking to my neighbor about Halloween, our conversation turned to Mischief Night. I was not much into that. I marveled at the huge trees toilet papered over night until it happened to ours. My neighbor, on the other hand, enjoyed mischief night. He recalled doing a house really good, blocks away in the neighborhood. Walking home, a patrol car spotted him and pulled up beside him and the officer questioned him if he was responsible for messing up a house blocks away. He took responsibility and said yes. The officer told him to go back and clean it up and return to the patrol car. He returned surprising

the officer who said, "I did not think you would come back!" He was warned and let go. My neighbor learned to take responsibility from his dad and he added, "My dad is a close friend with the officer who caught me!"

Remember the three constants I shared last week? Change, choice, and principles? My neighbor learned principals from his dad, like responsibility. He changed direction when caught and made a choice to do the right thing. One of the principals I remember from a saint was this quote, "Preach the Gospel and if necessary use words!" Similar to this proverb, "Actions speaks louder than words!"

In Acts 20:9ff, St. Paul talked to the brethren till midnight. A young man fell asleep in the window and fell to the ground three floors below. Paul went down and bending over him took him in his arms and said, "Do not be alarmed, for his life is in him." Paul went back upstairs broke bread and ate, he continued to converse until dawn and then left. A pastor preached on this text noting that this account of St. Paul's conversation was not written down. The most powerful message delivered by Paul in the gathering was the action taken to save a young man's life. The author of Acts so noted!

Barbara Brown Taylor, an Episcopal priest, shares in her sermon "The Yes and No Brothers" these final thoughts, "It is a very peculiar thing, this vacuum between what we believe and what we actually do. The theological word for it is sin - missing the mark - which is both inevitable and forgivable but never tolerable for those who love God. When God is the mark we are missing, the vacuum is simply

too painful to bear. It tears us up to say one thing and do another. It tears up our families, our friendship, our communities - when we say love and do indifference. Or say right and do wrong, or say "I will go" and go nowhere at all. What we believe has no meaning apart from what we do about it. There is not a creed or a mission statement in the world that is worth one visit to a sick friend, or one cup of water held out to someone who is longing for it.

Maybe you have read Islam Dinesen's ...*Out of Africa*. In it she tells the story of a young Kikuyu boy named Kitau who appeared at her door in Nairobi one day to ask if he might work for her. She said yes and he turned out to be a fine servant, but after three months he came to her again to ask her for a letter of recommendation to Sheik Ali bin Salim, a Muslim in Mombasa. Upset at the thought of losing him, she offered to raise Kitau's pay, but he was firm about leaving.

He had decided he would become either a Christian or a Muslim, he explained, and his whole purpose in coming to live with her had been to see the ways and habits of Christians up close. Next he would go live for three months with Sheik Ali to see how Muslims behaved and then he would make up his mind. Aghast, Dinesen wrote, "I believe that even an Archbishop, when he had had these facts laid before him, would have said, or at least thought, as I said, 'Good God, Kitau, you might have told me that when you came here.'"

God does not tell us ahead of time. Or, more to the point, God has been telling us all along - that there is no shortage of people who say, believe, or stand for all the right things...What God is short of are people who will go where God calls them and do what God gives them to do - even say, when it goes against their beliefs. To quote Soren Kierkegaard, Jesus wants Followers, not admirers...the important thing is what our lives say and they are as easy for most people to read as the story of the Yes and No brothers. To tell which one you are, look in any mirror. "What is moving? Your mouth or your feet?"

Amen.