

## 26<sup>th</sup> Sunday – Year A

A student once asked her teacher, “Do fish think?” The teacher pondered a moment, “Hmm, let me see. There’s a fish pond in back of my house. Every evening for three weeks, I threw fish food in the water near the left bank. The fish came and ate.

Then one evening I threw fish food in the pond near the right bank. I noticed that the fish were still going to the left bank.

For nearly three weeks I threw fish food near the right bank, but the fish were still going to the left bank. Then one evening the fish noticed the food was over at the right bank. They swam across the pond. But they were so starved from not eating, they died right before they came to the food.

Do fish think? Yes, but not fast enough.”

The story Jesus tells about the two sons has to do with not thinking fast enough. Things have changed, but some of Jesus’ hearers do not pick up on it fast enough. His presence and preaching has been so powerful that even people who had not been inclined to practice their faith much all of a sudden are coming to believe.

The leaders who were accustomed to being in charge of how the Jews practiced their faith failed to notice the big effect Jesus was having on all sorts of people, and stayed stuck in their old ways

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of thinking. They kept to their judgment that some people were beyond help and should be shunned rather than welcomed.

That was not what God wanted from them. He wanted them to be open to the possibility that even hardened sinners could come to the Lord. And when they did, they were to be welcomed.

Because some of Jesus hearers said they were followers of God, but didn't act like it, Jesus had to help them see what was going on. He wanted them to be able to make the change in their thinking that would lead them to a deeper understanding of God's love and God's desire never to give up on anyone. God wants to save all of us.

If we get in the way of that, by thinking that we are the only ones worth saving, or that we are saving ourselves, which is even worse, we will find ourselves being the ones on the outside looking in as the heavenly wedding feast gets into full swing.

One of the biggest obstacles that gets in the way of the mental flexibility needed to keep up with God's saving action is the world is the flip side of one of our faith's most comforting characteristics.

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Since we have a tradition 2000 years in the making and still going strong, we have a great resource for navigating the ups and downs of life and all the new developments that the surrounding culture throws our way.

It's comforting to know that the wisdom of our tradition has stood the test of time and that it offers us a sure harbor among the storm-tossed seas of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. What a blessing!

However, our tradition is not the be all and end all. Our tradition has not produced the full flowering of the kingdom of God, which still lies in our future and which is beyond our ability to bring about.

If we begin to choose the comfort of what we have known in favor of the promise of the better thing God has in store for us, we will fall into the same trap that the religious leaders of Jesus' day fell into.

We'll make judgments about others. We'll refuse to admit that conversion of life is possible. We won't let them into the community we've formed. And we find ourselves missing out on the community they have formed with Jesus.

Those poor fish figured out too late that their food

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was available, but just not in the place they were used to looking for it. We have to be open to what God is doing right now to lead us forward to the fullness of the kingdom. Otherwise we might miss out, too.