

She stood to face the crowd--
she was afraid, knowing her life would soon end.
Her heart pounded wildly,
she heard the insults that filled the air:
"Harlot!" "Sinner!" "Stone her!"

A clod of dirt hit her on the cheek, and the circle began to close.

And then a voice, quiet and calm, asked, "*What has this woman done?*"
And suddenly, everything changed.

He shifted uncomfortably,
aware of the leaf tickling his left ear,
I can't believe I'm in a tree, he thought.
Yet, hours earlier, he had scrambled up the tree like an 8 year-old,
determined to see this man that everyone talked about.

It didn't matter that the people of Jericho hated him.
It didn't matter that they called him a traitor and a pig.
It didn't matter that even now people were laughing at him.
He wanted to see him.

And then a voice, warm with laughter, shouted up at him,
"Zacchaeus, Come down! I want to stay at your house tonight!"
And suddenly, everything changed.

He had always obeyed the law. Ask anyone.

He prayed when he was supposed to pray.
He gave what he was supposed to give.
He ate what he was supposed to eat.
He stayed far away from sinners, and always paid his debts.
He was righteous. He was just.
He was honorable. Ask anyone.

Yet one day, in Gennesaret, he heard a man named Jesus say,

*This people honors me only with their lips,
while their hearts are far from me...*

Listen and understand.

*What goes into the mouth does not make a person unclean,
but what comes out ...*

And suddenly, everything changed.

He didn't want to work that day.

It seemed as if he was always working.

Bending over the vines, carrying water, plucking leaves,
checking for mold and bugs.

Working in a vineyard was grinding, thankless, backbreaking work.

And no matter how many times they went out into the vineyard,
there was always more work.

More vines to trim, more grapes to pick, more dust to swallow.

Well, not today. No sir.

There were things to do that seemed a whole lot more interesting
than working in a vineyard.

And so he said no, I won't go...

but later he felt bad and change his mind,
He returned to the field and went to work.

And Jesus asks us, which one did the will of his father?

Throughout his life,

Jesus tried to teach us
that while our words matter—that while what we think matters,
our actions, what we do, matter even more.

He tried to show us

that while our past may be important--
it's what we do today and tomorrow that really counts.

The woman, who was an adulterer, had the chance to go and sin no more...

The tax collector, whom people laughed at, repaid his victims four fold...

The scrupulous young man met Jesus and learned the meaning of mercy...

These were people who not only heard, but lived what Jesus taught.
They were people who, despite the mistakes of the past,
made the message of Jesus a part of their future.

Prostitutes in heaven.

Thieves as the just ones.

Traitors praised as holy.

Sinners forgiven while the righteous are chastised.

If we're really listening to the Gospel,
the Christian message can be pretty shocking.

It suggests that sitting piously in church on Sunday
may be less important to God
than the choices we make on Monday and Tuesday.

It suggests that arguing over religion or politics
may be less important than the way we treat those with whom we disagree.

It suggests that talking about poverty
and worrying about justice
and feeling sorry for the broken and the wounded
just may not be what God has in mind.

The Gospel of Jesus Christ suggests that no matter how unsavory our past--
no matter how many sins we have committed--
no matter how many times we have said "NO!"--
there is always time to hear the message,
there's always time to change our minds,
there's always time to get to work.

It's a choice every day.

It's **your** choice every day.

Choose well!