**Let’s Go to the Vineyard 2017 10 01**

**Matthew 21:23-32 Pr. H. Adachi**

May the Grace and Peace of the Lord be poured into your hearts!

About 20 years have passed since my friend from my former job (at the medical device company) was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer. When he was diagnosed, that same day, he told me the doctor said he would live less than one year.

For that moment, I could not say a word. However, as a baptized Christian, I said to him… or I should say, I asked him, “May I talk about the savior Jesus?” He immediately replied, “No, thank you,” and he told me about his mother who was a Taiwanese religious leader. In other words, he wanted to tell me he has his own religion that he and his family believe and that it is not Christianity.

I decided not to say anything about Christianity anymore. His life became being repeatedly hospitalized and released. I often visited him both in hospitals and at his home. Actually, I had to talk about the software development project that he was leading, but also, I listened to him talk about what he was thinking and feeling.

Then three months after the diagnosis, he said something different from what he originally told me. He said to me, “I would like to talk about God.” Which meant I could talk about Jesus Christ. Although he said “No, thank you,” three months ago, he changed his mind, and replied God’s invitation. I would like to talk about him more in the later part of this message.

Let me talk about the Gospel text given today. One of the major points of the text is that the elder brother said “No, I won’t,” to the Father’s recommendation “Go and work in the vineyard”, but later he changed his mind and went to the vineyard.

This story is a parable and the Father is God. The elder brother was the tax collectors and prostitutes who were judged as sinners from the Jewish religious leaders. However, those replied to the Baptist John’s calling, “all should repent.”

As for the vineyard, last week’s Gospel text was the laborers in the vineyard and the vineyard represents the kingdom where God reigns. Since this is the vineyard, this is the place where laborers work for fruit according to God’s will. In last week’s parable, laborers were invited to come early in the morning, 9AM, noon, 3PM and even 5PM. Whenever it was, God was inviting all laborers regardless of their background.

Probably, the father in this week’s parable wanted his children to realize that they are beloved and cared for by God. Like I said the vineyard represents the kingdom of God but also, the vineyard is God’s church in this world and people are invited and loved unconditionally.

Then, in this parable, who is the younger brother? Even though he said that he would go, but he did not go to the vineyard. To me the younger brother seems to be Jewish leaders who were proud of themselves since they were keeping the laws in the Torah.

Most probably, the message that the Baptist John said, “repent”, was not a rebuke of the Jewish leaders. However, since they thought themselves as Jewish religious leaders who follow God’s law well, they did not think they needed to repent and to respond to John’s calling. In other words, they were not really living with God, in their hearts, and not loving and caring about all people including tax collectors and prostitutes.

So, what is God telling those of us living in the modern world? What do you think, are you the elder brother or the younger brother in this parable? You might be feeling that you are both the elder brother and younger one, or either one of them or neither…

Here, I would like to continue telling the story about my friend who was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer. Since he said he wanted to talk about God, Jesus Christ. He not only talked with me but Pastor Takatsuka (LCR’s Japanese speaking pastor at the time) also met with him and his wife. Their native language was Taiwanese, so they were encouraged to attend a Taiwanese speaking Christian church near his home in Irvine. Several months later they were baptized.

Although his life in this world would last less than one year according to his doctor, the reality was that he lived more than two years. On Pentecost Sunday in 2001, he passed away surrounded by his wife, three children, and his parents from Taiwan. A couple of weeks before he passed away, he mentioned to me “Even though I got cancer, there were good things. Our family ties became stronger.” He also said, “I would like to evangelize and proclaim the good news with you, Adachi-san.” What he said became a touchstone that led me to resign my position at the medical device company and later on to enter candidacy process to be an ordained pastor.

Back in the late 1990s when he was diagnosed, I was attending Resurrection Lutheran Church every Sunday with my family and also, I was proud of being raised in a fourth- generation Christian family. Therefore, I thought that I was much closer to God than my friend was. However, I am reflecting on what he and I were like. He said no thank you at first but changed his mind, he was the one who truly went to the vineyard and lives with Jesus. I realize that I was more like the younger son who did not go to the vineyard at that time.

As a preacher today, I would like to mention the same words that Jesus said to invite all people, including tax collectors, prostitutes, and any Jewish religious leaders. Why don’t we go to the vineyard and work together?

In 1988, several of the Lutheran Church bodies got together and formed a new church body called the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, ELCA. This congregation, Resurrection, is part of the ELCA.

We are told that the number of ELCA pastors who are ordained every year is declining. Also, the total number of worship attendees, in ELCA congregations, is declining. However, what congregations do within the community has increased in modern times.

Let me say this again, “Let’s go to the vineyard and work together.” Amen.