

Matthew 21:28-32

The In Group and the Out Group

Nunawading and Waverley, 27-9-20

Dear friends in Christ,

Our community is splitting into groups. JK Rowling has had her books removed from the shelves of a Perth bookstore because of her transgender views. The community is seen as privileged white males, transgender and other gendered groups, left wing and right-wing groups, those who are politically correct, those tainted by colonialism. Some groups must be de-platformed, others should do the censoring. What a terrible situation of grievance and hatred we live in.

Jesus considered that only two groups exist. One was the spiritually elite. **The first child** who agreed to work in the vineyard but then **later didn't enter it**, was this group. They could say **Lord, Lord** to Jesus' face, yet never enter the kingdom of God. They were into power and orthodox religion. They restricted the group size based on a strict interpretation of God's laws adding human traditions to them that were impossible to keep for ordinary people. They were mostly the Pharisees. Some of the elite were part of the ruling class, such as chief priests, members of the Sanhedrin, many of them Sadducees and those close to royalty, the nobility surrounding Herod.

The other group were the **tax collectors and prostitutes**, those who heeded John's call to repentance and through Jesus' gift of forgiveness, entered the kingdom of God. They were represented by **the second child who flatly refused to go into the vineyard but later, had a change of mind and went to the vineyard and worked.**

Jesus' two groups are easily defined: those relying on their own spiritual powers and goodness saying, "We have the right ideas" and those who give up on themselves and trust in the Lord Jesus and his gift of the kingdom. That's it; there are no other groups.

What about us as a congregation? I don't think anyone here crassly thinks, "we are the in group and all the pagans out there are the out group". But do we have filters? One filter is size. A church grows until it reaches a family sized church, just large enough that people can be friends and the pastor is still able to handle most things. It is about 70 worshipping people. Won't a church grow past that number? Yes, but it

requires intentional planning and effort, such as expanding the number of leaders, beginning new ministry groups and small groups led by members and not restricted by the pastor's capacity. Above all, it needs the attitude of love for those not yet here amongst us, great openness to new comers, integration of people who come from outside and of those young people maturing in our midst.

I believe that we don't want to filter people out because of our size. However, like any other congregation, we can become comfortable in our situation, unwilling to change because we are happy knowing each other. I have received a cold and unwelcoming reception in some Lutheran congregations. The Holy Spirit is saying to us, "what about all those others?"

What if we were a church of prostitutes, ex-drug pushers, homosexuals, pimps, and Westpac board members? Then the bar to enter would be so low anyone could come in. What if we had recovering anorexics, people openly talking about their depression, people with bi-polar and intellectual disabilities? What sort of atmosphere would prevail in our congregation? Imagine people speaking of being victims of sex abuse, domestic violence and rape? Then, anyone with a burden would find it dead easy to be here.

I have put it in the extreme because that is the church Jesus created. There is nothing wrong with being middle class because we need Christ, too. Jesus our Lord, is the Saviour of all. But the busted and broken have a way of showing most clearly what the church is. It is a church without barriers.

You and I have embraced the invitation to freely enter into the kingdom of God. We do not sneer at and snub people as unclean. We believe that the worse people become, the further ahead they are in the queue of those going into the kingdom of God. In fact, all those who heed his message and believe it, are already in the kingdom of God because of Christ. Jesus calls them **the first**.

Can I end with a prayer from one of our members about people who are thinking of joining our online Alpha course?

2. That those attending will warmly and patiently embrace any whose English is not good.

4. That attendees will be challenged and feel free to open their minds to new ways of seeing through Alpha, instead of "resting easy" in their prior knowledge of the gospel.