Sermon *Those Who Do the Will of the Father*
The Very Rev. David J. Marshall, All Angels 9.27.26

Exodus 17:1-7
Psalm 78:1-4, 12-16
Philippians 2:1-13
Matthew 21:23-32

One of my biggest fears of preaching to you all is that I will come up with something that I think is rather profound but the rest of you will shrug your shoulders and say you've already thought enough about it. Despite my fear, I feel compelled today to share with you what I've been thinking about this week which is this: people are complicated. Com. Pli. Ca. Ted.

Take for instance, the biblical character of King David. He was the greatest of the kings of Israel. He united the twelve-tribes into one nation. He wrote many of the psalms including one of the finest things ever written: *The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside still waters, he restores my soul*. King David did all that, and, from what I have read, he also swore like a sailor. And, much more troubling, he desired a woman named Bathsheba (I'm giving you the PG version here) whose husband was in King David's army. He ordered his commander to pull back from the husband/solider so he would be killed in the fighting. As such, King David is complicated.

The Letter of James in the New Testament says that the mouth can both bless and curse. It can heal and mend and it can create a proverbial wildfire. This tells me that humans are complicated. God knows this. God has compassion on us and loves us. God also sent Jesus to us to help make simple God's will (despite our complicated lives).

In the Gospel lesson, the religious leaders of the day, in the Temple, interrupt Jesus' sermon to challenge him about his own authority. Jesus tells them a (fictional) story: A man has two sons, both of whom he told to work in the field – one said he will not work, but then changed his mind and worked in the field; the other said he would work but then did not go. Jesus then asked the religious leaders, "Which of the two did the will of his father?" They replied, "The one who worked in the field." Jesus said to them, "Truly I tell you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are going into the kingdom of God ahead of you. For John came to you in the way of righteousness and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes believed him; and even after you saw it, you did not change your minds and believe him."

Parenting is complicated; being a daughter or a son is complicated too; however, the story in today's Gospel lesson is not. Jesus, who knows just how complicated we all are, came to us to make things simple. It doesn't matter what you say, it's what you do. One could say they believe in doing the will of the Father (in heaven) but then never do it. Another could say they do not believe in the Heavenly Father but then go do the will of Him. Of those two groups of people, Jesus says the ones doing the will are the ones who get into the Kingdom first. I believe that is the good news: despite our complication, God loves us. God knows how complicated and conflicted we are. And yet God loves us, has compassion for us, and forgives us. Jesus came with an uncomplicated message. (Just because it uncomplicated doesn't make it easy) Jesus said I

want you to love God with all your heart, and I want you to love your neighbors as yourselves. He his followers that people will know you're my follower by your love; by the way that you love one another. Love is how they know that we are who we are and who we follow. And we're now in the 20th century of doing this act of loving. And people haven't become less complicated. In fact, we may have become even more complicated. Yet, the message remains the same. So, in all of our complication and all the things that make us who we are, in the ability to both bless and to curse, interwoven in this, I think, is the will of the father. The will of the father is to have compassion, to not judge, and to love one another. Jesus goes out of his way to express to those who are unlovable are the ones that we are called to love. The ones who are the most complicated are the ones who Jesus calls us to offer compassion to. Not to let them walk on us, not to let them hurt us. that that's nowhere a part of this message, but to listen to them and have compassion for how complicated they are.

I know a priest who frequented the coffee shop near the church to do his weekly writing. There were three people who often would come in around the same time, order coffee, and complain about their jobs. One day he was near them and struck up a conversation. It turns out, they are IRS field agents in a nearby office. They are the ones who knock on doors, collect documents, interview people and conduct audits. It's a tough job. For these folks, none of them said they were called to be IRS field agents. Because of circumstances, and complicated lives, they found themselves in their current position (and because of the retirement package, they stay). They got to know him – found out he served at a nearby church – and one of them attended on a Sunday morning. She said that for the first time (in a long time) she's going to tell the truth about what she does for a living (and not hide behind being an "accountant for the Dept of Treasury"). I'd love to tell you she was well received by everyone but, you know, people are complicated. However, on her second Sunday, the lectionary reading for the church was today's Gospel lesson about the prostitutes and tax collectors getting into the Kingdom of Heaven before the religious elite because they heard the message and acted on it (like the son who worked in the field). That changed things for the people in the church. The inspiring part for me is that this group of field agents started responding to the message of compassion and treated their profession in a new way. They didn't complain (as much) and started seeing their people in a different way. The members of the church saw what the agents do as difficult and complex and embraced them. This is all reminiscent of how the Early Church welcomed those from all walks of life into the church – they didn't judge them, they received them and loved them.

In a few minutes we're going to stand and say the words of our faith found in the Nicene Creed. I don't think God has a checklist to see who says it. But, I think God does check in to see if we are "working in the field" which I believe is showing compassion to one another and doing our best to love God and love our neighbor.

God knows just how complicated your life is. And God knows how complicated the life of your neighbor is. God asks that we have compassion on one another and a good way to start is to recognize that your neighbor's life is just as complicated (if not more so) than yours and that somehow God loves us and them too.

This past week, we had a short video from the church (from last week's sermon) that became viral and had over 230k views on Facebook. My relationship with Facebook is complicated. I

don’t trust the site but the Wall Street Journal wrote that the people this particular church has success at reaching out to are on it (which means we need to be on it too). A couple of years ago I reluctantly started the All Angels Facebook page. We now have over four thousand people following our posts. Sometimes I get challenging or negative comments. In fact, on one recent post that has me saying, “The greatest commandment is this…” someone wrote, “This guy has no authority to say these things.” My first reaction was to push back on the comment; but, I thought that this person’s life must be really complicated and suddenly I had compassion for them. I thought how interesting that they watched the clip and took the time to write. It changed the way I saw the clip and that person. It made all the difference.

And if the person you agree with and the person on social media that you disagree with, God knows exactly how complicated their lives are. And what Jesus is saying is that we're all called to go out to do the will of the father. And not with the things that we say, but with our actions, with compassion, being able to see that one another, that this is a complicated world, but that the message of Jesus is clear. That we are to love one another as we are loved. We are for to forgive others as we have been forgiven. And so folks, it doesn't matter who you are, how many times you have told God, I will not go work in your field. It doesn't matter how many times you have said that because God is watching for when we do. when we go out and try to love one another, try to have compassion, try to have forgiveness, God rewards not for successes but for attempts uh the ability for us to let go and to receive and to give love as we have been given. So for all of those who have said to the father, I will not go work in your field. But then have changed their minds and go, the good news is God sees, God receives, and God invites us in our complicated lives and in this complicated world to attempt to have compassion and forgiveness as we have been forgiven. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.