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-- For a moment, I'd like you to think about the parable we just heard and change one thing about it. Suppose Jesus had asked the teachers and priests, *Which son was more honorable?* or *Which was the better son?*

-- I'm sure they would have answered "the second." Why is that? In the Middle East, honor is most important. To reply "No" in public to your father is the height of dishonor. Better to answer "Yes" and then ignore his command than to dishonor him.

-- Of course, Jesus didn't ask that question. He asked, *Which son did the will of the father?* Of course, they had to answer, "The first," even if they thought the second was the better son.

-- In a real sense, Jesus was challenging his Middle Eastern culture. But we Westerners don't have reason to boast because of this. We have our own cultural faults, and God's word speaks to those as well.

-- One of those faults is a tendency to refuse to admit mistakes. When we do something that turns out to be wrong, we don't want to admit it. Many times we will make excuses or blame others.

-- Some people will even "double down" on their mistakes. Even when they are proven to be wrong, they will continue to repeat what they said or did, as if that will make it true. They believe this is a sign of strength.

-- Fortunately, that first son was able to admit his mistake and go out and do his father's will. The prophet Ezekiel had spoken about that just before the passage we heard in our first reading.

-- He spoke about the call to turn away from sin. If we turn from our evil ways—even if we have been doing evil most of our lives—and come back to the Lord, we will be saved, and none of our evil deeds will be remembered.

-- That's what the first son did. He turned away from evil. But the second son ended up doing what is evil. Because of this, God did not pay attention to his "honorable" words. After all, they were empty words.

- Of course, the teachers and priests thought God's way was not fair. God doesn't pay attention to honor. God looks at our actions.
- Many of us think God is not fair for a slightly different reason. We tend to think of being saved as something like a balance scale. If our good deeds outweigh our bad deeds, we believe we're in good shape.
- On the other hand, if our bad deeds outweigh our good deeds, we're sunk. And so we judge people who've done terrible things as beyond God's help.
- But God doesn't work that way. God takes no pleasure in the death of a sinner—ANY sinner—but wants that sinner to return and live.
- So each of us is called to continuing conversion. Each of us is called to admit our mistakes and sins and turn back to the Lord. Making excuses or doubling down only leads people further away from God.
- I rarely follow a TV series. But, the past two weeks, I've watched most of Ken Burns' series on the War in Vietnam on PBS. I was at the tail end of the "Vietnam" generation. I was old enough to get a draft lottery number, but that was about it. Still, it was personal to me.
- During that war, over and over, civilian and military leaders refused to admit mistakes out of a false notion of "honor." And our country and Vietnam both paid dearly for it.
- In our own lives, like that first son, we are challenged to admit our mistakes and our sins and turn back to our heavenly father. He will be there for us with his gift of eternal life.
- But we can only share in it if we turn back to him... again and again.