

Dear Friends of Emmanuel,

Greetings! It's officially Autumn. The chill of winter is in the air, windows are closed, air conditioners stored and winter 'woolies' come out of the moth balls. As students, Autumn was/is also the time to take our brains out of storage and begin a new academic year. Our readings for Sunday, Sept. 27 are exactly that – a challenge to our thinking, an invitation to think differently.

In the Hebrew Scripture, Ezekiel 18:1-4, 25-32, the Lord tells the prophet Ezekiel that he will judge the people of Israel. The people of Israel need to find “a new heart and a new spirit” in order to live. It's a harsh message and challenges the Israelites to repent – to change their thinking – to return to righteousness. There are parallels to this challenge in the Gospel of Matthew also (Matt 21:23-32). As often seen in rabbinic dialogue, we find Jesus questioned by the chief priests and elders. They ask, “By what authority are you doing these things?”

Jesus responds with his own question; who do YOU think I am? And then tells the story of the man who had two sons. One son told his father he wasn't going to work in the vineyard but relents and goes. The second son told his father he would go to work but didn't. Who had done the right thing? Clearly the son who actually went to work is the one who will be rewarded rather than the one who lied to his father.

Jesus is being offensive to the authorities by claiming that tax collectors and prostitutes are more righteous than those who follow the law and claim to be righteous. The tax collectors repent. They find ‘a new heart and a new spirit.’ The son who lied to his father is not the one who is favored but the one who repented or changed his mind was the one to be rewarded.

These readings challenge us to reach into our hearts and find the authority of God. We are asked to reframe our preconceived ideas about life – to repent and to place ourselves in God's merciful hands. We are asked to examine our own desires and motives in light of the teachings of Jesus. We are asked to become the one who goes out into the vineyard and works in God's vineyard.

Hope to see you on **Saturday, September 26 at 5:00 pm** to pray and talk together. In the name of Christ, I remain,

The Rev. Joyce Caggiano, Ph.D
Priest in Residence, Emmanuel, West Roxbury