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An rfour.org Children's Time Message

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Written for Sunday, October 8, 2017

18th Sunday after Pentecost

Lectionary Year A

Scripture: [Matthew 21:33-46](#) [**Summary:** *Parable Of The Vineyard Thieves*]

Supplies Needed:

- Fake/plastic food (like what you might find in most church nurseries).
- A volunteer (an adult member of the congregation or an older youth) who is willing to act like a very young child who doesn't want to eat his/her food.
- A chair for the volunteer to sit on.
- Possibly a tray to put in front of the volunteer where you can place the fake food.
- Possibly a bib (!) for the volunteer to wear.

ASK (a.k.a *The On-Ramp*)

- Good morning!
- To get started, I want you to think *waaaay* back into your past when you were maybe 2 years old or younger and would occasionally sit in a high chair during meal times.
- Do you think you were a neat and tidy eater when you were 2?
- Do you think you ate all the food that your parents gave you when you were 2?
- Well, we asked [*name of volunteer*] to help us remember how some 2 year olds sometimes eat.
- So s/he is going to sit right here.
- *Optional:* We're even going to put a bib on him/her.
- And now I'm going to give [*name of volunteer*] some nice tasty food [*hold up some of the plastic food*]
- As you can tell, this is not actually real food, so we're going to have to pretend that this is some real, nice, tasty food.
- Alright, let's see what happens.

How Demonstration Should Proceed

- *Hand one piece of food to the volunteer (who we will call “Timmy” from now on for convenience).*
- *Timmy is to toss the food away (like a young kid with cheerios), every time. At no time should Timmy pretend to eat the food.*
- *Every time Timmy tosses the food away, give Timmy more food.*
- *Talk like a tired parent. “Cmon, Timmy. You’re making a mess. Put the food in your mouth, not on the floor. Oh look at that, you missed your mouth again.”*
- *Keep giving Timmy food. Timmy should keep throwing the food away (and making faces – both fussy and happy faces – hopefully the volunteer has a lot of fun with this role)*
- *After all the food has been thrown, look around, mumble something about the “five minute rule,” and pick up the thrown food. Then start giving Timmy the same food again.*
- *Give Timmy food 4 to 6 times.*
- *[Ask the kids] “Timmy sure is being stubborn and making bad choices by throwing away the food that I give him. Why do you think I keep giving Timmy more food?” (because he needs the food to live)*
- *That’s right! What would happen if his throwing away of the food I give him convinced me to never give him food again – what would happen to Timmy? (he’d get really hungry and eventually die)*
- *That’d be bad, wouldn’t it, if he died? We don’t want THAT to happen. So we all agree that it’s a good thing that parents keep feeding their fussy two-year olds, isn’t it?*
- *[Thank the volunteer who played Timmy and return your focus to the kids].*

TELL (a.k.a. *The Freeway*)

- In the scripture story that we read today, Jesus tells a parable (a story) where a number of people live and work in a vineyard that is not theirs
- Now, you might think they would be very thankful to live and work where they do.
- But instead, they act very stubbornly and keep saying no to the options that are given to them, just like our “two-year old” kept saying no just a few minutes ago.
- Now, you might expect the owner of the vineyard to be very upset with these people and just stop trying. But instead, the owner keeps giving second-chances to the people who keep making these bad choices.
- One of the why Jesus tells this story, I think, is to remind us that God, like the owner of the vineyard, gives us second chances, even to those of us who keep making bad choices.

- If God just gave up on us, then that would be really bad for us, I think, just like it would be really bad for two-year old Timmy if his parent had just walked away and never fed him again.

SHARE the Good News (a.k.a. *The Destination*)

- In other words, even if we *keep* making bad choices, God does not give up on us.
- Now, that doesn't mean that we should try to be like Timmy was or like the people in the story were – where we don't even try to change our mistakes.
- Sometimes, even oftentimes, our mistakes can hurt others and ourselves.
- But no matter how much damage our mistakes cause or how often we make them, God doesn't give up on us.
- God keeps loving us and offering us second chances because God loves us like a parent loves their child.
- And that's the Good News for today.
- Let's pray – this is a repeat-after-me prayer.

CLOSING Prayer

Dear God,

Dear God,

Thank you for never giving up on us...

Thank you for never giving up on us...

...and for loving us...

...and for loving us...

...like a parent loves a child.

...like a parent loves a child.

We love you, too.

We love you, too.

Amen