YOU INSPIRE US TO SERVE.

This is a Sermon based on Matthew 21:23-32 and other texts.
Rev. Dr. Ted Rust is the Preacher for September 27, 2020.

At their first meeting, Army recruiter Sgt. Derek Melendez had bad news for Tashime Felder. It was March 2019 and Felder, then 28 years old, **wanted to enlist in the Army**. Felder stood 5 feet 8 inches tall and weighed 297 pounds.

Melendez was the **station commander of the Recruiting Center and appreciated Felder's desire to serve his country, but there was a problem. The young man did not meet the Army's weight standards**, which are calculated according to age and height. To successfully enlist, Felder's weight needed to be less than 190 pounds and his body fat less than 28%. At the time, he was 107 pounds over the weight limit, and his body fat was 35%.

Melendez had dealt with other potential recruits who needed to lose 40 or 50 pounds to pass the physical, but never anyone who had to lose 110 pounds. So while Melendez really liked Felder, he had to **decline his application.** The recruiter said he **didn't expect Felder to return**, given the tremendous obstacle he faced in order to join the Army.

But it turns out that being turned down was the motivation Felder needed to begin an impressive weight-loss journey that has led to an astonishing physical transformation.

Last month, Tashime Felder returned to the recruiting center to enlist. **It was a triumphal return**. This time, he was 110 pounds lighter, and his body fat percentage was just 17%. Mr. Felder - Welcome to the United States army! "**I am really proud of him,"** said the Recruiter. **"That wasn't normal, what he did. Most people would have given up. He literally had to change his life in order to join the Army**. It fires you up to see he was so **inspired to serve** and was ready to do what it took to reach his goal."

Felder reported for duty on September 8 at Fort Jackson in South Carolina, where he will learn how to fix video and audio equipment and computers. At the end of his 5 year commitment, he said: "**My long-term goal is to work with veterans who had PTSD. Eventually I want to get my master's degree and try to open a counseling center."**

For now, though, he's just happy to be heading into the next phase of his life. He knows the **discipline he showed in losing weight** will help him in many areas of his life. Meantime, he feels better each day, not carrying the extra pounds.

"It's absolutely makes a major difference," he said. "I am so excited," Felder said. "It took a lot of hard work. And if I can do that, I feel I can do almost everything." Mr. Felder is a good example of someone "**inspired to serve**."

Our Lord's parable about 2 sons who don't do what they say reveals surprises in the Kingdom of God. We have all experienced the sting of broken promises, the pain of unfulfilled commitments, and the failure of human words to reassure us. We all know just **how cheap talk can be** in the face of our hardest challenges. Tashime Felder could not "talk" his way in the Army. He had to change his life in a dramatic way. He was **inspired to serve** and so was able to work hard toward his goal.

Today's Gospel Reading is from Matthew 21:23-32. This text reminds us of the **fickleness of words and labels**. When some community leaders attempt to **catch Jesus in a malicious verbal trap**—Jesus goes into action. **Jesus seizes the opportunity to point to the gracious Word of God that cuts through such word games with a power that is realized always in "action."**

Psalm 25:4-5 and 8-9 says:

"Make me to know your ways, O Lord; teach me your paths. Lead me in your truth, and teach me, for you are the God of my salvation; for you I wait all day long. Good and upright is the Lord; therefore he instructs sinners in the way. He leads the humble in what is right."

In the Holy Scriptures God makes promises with words that are not cheap but costly – bought with the sacrifice of God's only Son. In the **Sacrament of Holy Baptism**, the words of God's commitment to us are placed over all who are baptized in Christ's death and raised with him to a new and eternal identity. In **Baptism** we are named precious children of God with an eternal future that nothing can destroy. **In Holy Communion,** we receive not just Christ's **words** of forgiveness and new life, but his **very body and blood. In worship, the living God inspires us to serve others, following the example of Jesus himself**. In worship, God also calls us to use our voices to speak God's word of promise to one another. **In worship, God calls us to use our gifts and resources to serve him and others in his "vineyard" which is the entire world.**

Matthew 21:28 says:

"Go and work in the vineyard today."

Almost 5,000 people waited for several hours in the rain in England for one purpose. They wanted to get tested to see if they were a match to help save the life of a 5-year old boy fighting a rare cancer after parents asked for help. How exciting to see God inspiring 5,000 people to serve and try and save a boy's life!

Theologian C.S. Lewis says this:

"There is no neutral ground in the universe. Every square inch, every split second is claimed by God and counter claimed by Satan!

The Pharisees in Matthew 21 demanded to know where Jesus got his **authority**. If Jesus told them his authority came from God, they would accuse Jesus of blasphemy. If Jesus said that he was acting on his own authority, the crowds would be convinced that the Pharisees had the greater authority. But our Lord answered his critics with a seemingly unrelated question that exposed their real motives. The Pharisees did **not really want an answer** to their question. **They wanted only to trap Jesus and make him look bad.** Jesus showed that the Pharisees wanted the "truth" only if it supported their own views and causes. Our Lord's "**authority" came from "who he was," not from anything superficial** like education, title, position or knowing the power people. If we are disciples of Jesus – **God has also given us authority**. We can confidently speak & act to love others since God has authorized us.

Christ and His Church are always working to turn people toward life. Christ and His Church are constantly **inspiring us to serve**.

- When our ways are unfair and hurt the poor, God gives us new hearts and new spirits.
- When sin permeates our cultures, institutions, and systems God changes our minds and evil traditions & even changes laws.
- God is constantly working to relieve your suffering and the suffering of those who are ill in body, mind, or spirit.

- God inspires us to be signs of his mercy, love, and joy. (Like those 5,000 people in England & our health care workers)

Our life is a journey with God. When we encounter others who are having a hard time or need our help, it can be **easy to give them words of reassurance**, but they may need **more** than that. **Christ calls us to participate in the power of a word that is realized in "action."**
God inspires us to look even for some small way to demonstrate our care and concern for others:

- Becoming their friend instead of their critic,
- Spending extra time with someone who is lonely or hurting,
- Helping with a meal or project,
- Paying an expense for someone hurting for money,
- Making someone's life easier,
- Offering to assist with worship at 9 or 11 a.m.

James 1:22-25 says:

"Be doers of the word, and not merely hearers who deceive themselves. For if any are hearers of the word and not doers, they are like those who look at themselves in a mirror, for they look at themselves and, on going away, immediately forget what they were like. But those who look into the perfect law of God, the law of liberty, and persevere, being not hearers who forget but doers who act—they will be blessed in their doing."

It's a fact that **Black patients lose limbs to diabetes at 3 times the rate that others do.** Imagine the suffering for them and their families, but here is the good news. I read recently about one Doctor who is on a mission to spare them this unjust fate. Another person God inspired to serve and bring healing and mercy.

In today's Parable of Jesus the man tells his sons to go work in the vineyard. The (1) **first son says "no"** but later changes his mind and **goes**. The (2) **second son says "yes" but never goes. Today, I'm inviting you to be the third (3) person the Master asks to go work in the vineyard. When God calls you to go and work in his vineyard simply say "yes" with your mouth and then also say "yes" with your actions.**

I believe God is inspiring you right now to make a difference in someone's life.
God says you are:

- Chosen – 1 Peter 2:9
- Loved – John 3:16
- Powerful – Ephesians 3:16
- A Rejoicing person – Philippians 4:4
- A person of Faith – Hebrews 11:1
- A Gentle Servant – Philippians 4:5
- Forgiven – Psalm 103:12
- Protected – Psalm 121
- Hopeful person – Romans 5:4
- Called to be Victorious – 1 Corinthians 15:57.

"So thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." God's will is for us to "hearers of the Word" and "doers of the Word." We are not like son #1 or son #2. **We are your new Children of God. We use true words and loving actions to change the Church and change the world. Let us pray.**

Jesus – you really do inspire us to serve others with our kind and truthful words and our loving actions. Continue to inspire us, guide us, give us new courage for our battles, and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.