

If you've got to get a job done and you can't do it alone, who you gonna call? And Ghostbusters aren't available. With the whole yellow pages to choose from, you can go for someone reliable. But if your resources are few or your family is small, you may not have much choice. We often have to depend on people who aren't reliable. Whether you want someone to take out the garbage, clean the house before the guests arrive, write a report before the meeting, or just to talk at the end of the day, if we can't depend on those people we begin to feel more and more alone and overworked. We begin to feel opinionated and unforgiving.

Have you ever been in the position of the farmer in today's parable? He asks two children to do a simple task; one says yes and one says no. And if that isn't bad enough the first one doesn't work and the other one does. How could you rely on children like that? How could you get anything done?

Jesus uses the parable to talk about unreliable people. Curiously, he doesn't condemn them all. We might be tempted to write them all off, but he distinguishes two types of behavior. One he can't stand, the other he loves. One, having said yes, does nothing; the other, having said no, repents. One is zealous, but the other is contrite.

To sin is bad news. But to sin and repent is better than doing nothing. God created us, God knows we're programmed to make a few mistakes along the way. What pleases God is if we say we're sorry when we do make mistakes. Both children in today's parable made mistakes. Only one did something about it.

Still, I pity the farmer. Even though people praise the son who repented, the farmer still doesn't know if he can rely on him. Sure, it worked out this time, but can he believe his child the next time?

The parable steers clear of this dilemma by focusing not on reliability, but on repentance. As difficult as it is to deal with unreliable people, it's not so bad if they repent. Why doesn't Jesus condemn both sons, since you can't rely on either one? Maybe he knew how often we would be unreliable, how often we would say, "Yes, Lord, I will work in the vineyard," but would not work, or "No, Lord, I will not," but would. All too often God the farmer cannot depend on us his children. But, as difficult as it is to deal with unreliable people, it's not so bad if they repent.

If God can forgive us, surely we can try to forgive one another.