

The Prodigal Son

Luke 15:11-32, Trinity Sunday III

June 16, 2013

Beloved of the Lord.....We live in a world which teaches us fathers are unnecessary or superfluous. When I was a teenager, single and unmarried mothers were promoted as sufficient to raise a child. No father was needed, for the state would provide welfare. Thirty years later things are not better but worse. Now they say a child can have two mothers, and no father is needed. No son can learn to be a father by two women. When a child is raised without a father, he is lacking a love only a father can give. Fathers love their children in a different way than mothers. We love our children by protecting them from the world so they are always safe in our strong arms. We are the stronger vessel and that is our calling. We also show our love for our children, by working hard at our jobs, sacrificing everything for the sake of our children, yet we teach them God alone provides. We love our children also by the words we speak to them, Law and Gospel. By the law we restrain their flesh and reveal their sins, and we also show them the good God would have us do. By the Gospel we seek to comfort them when they are sorry for their sins. If we do not comfort them with the Gospel, they will conclude it is impossible to please us and being discouraged they will no longer try to obey. So the Bible says, "ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." What we really want to do with our children, is raise and lift them up in the love of Jesus Christ. For through Jesus we have learned that God the Father has had mercy upon all sinners, and with such a great love we have learned to show mercy to our own rebellious children. For who among us is not a rebel against God's holy laws. It is therefore a glorious thing to see a penitent son embraced tightly to the bosom of a strong, yet merciful father. May God the Holy Spirit give and grant to us fathers, that merciful heart only God can give, and may we as sons honor, and highly esteem every father God has given. "Honour thy father and mother; (which is the first commandment with promise;) That it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth. "

I. The younger rebellious son. Today's lesson is about a rebellious son who despises the love and authority of his own father, only to indulge himself in the sinful pleasures of the world. Proverbs one says, "A wise son maketh a glad father: but a foolish son *is* the heaviness of his mother.... He that gathereth in summer *is* a wise son: *but* he that sleepeth in harvest *is* a son that causeth shame." If the younger son had honored his father and mother, and gone out into the world simply to make a living, God's blessing would have been upon him. But since his heart lusted after sinful pleasure, he brought God's curse upon himself. "Blessings *are* upon the head of the just: but violence covereth the mouth of the wicked....The wise in heart will receive commandments: but a prating fool shall fall."

When we feel within ourselves that desire to break free of the authority of our parents, and the laws of the household, we should understand our own flesh is enticing us to sin. This younger son in our lesson felt too restricted in his father's house, and he wanted to break free. Despising his father's love, this younger son demanded his rightful inheritance. In those days while the father was yet alive, the son had the legal right to receive his inheritance. And while the father knew his son was rebelling against his authority, he knew the best thing to do was simply give the son his inheritance. Without a word the father obliges the son, not to bless his rebellion, but so no obstacle is placed in the mind of the son regarding the father's love. In other words, by giving the inheritance, the son could not conclude the father loved his money more than the son. No doubt it hurt the father deeply to see his son go astray.

But the son didn't care about hurting his father. Having everything he wanted, he moves far away and runs with the children of the world, indulging his flesh. No doubt He gets drunk and sleeps with women, parties and riots with the ungodly. He lives an evil life, despising all the commandments of his father. But the pleasures of this world are short lived. Soon he runs out of money, and just as quickly his *friends* vanish. Proverbs 23:5 says "Wilt thou set thine eyes upon that which is not? for *riches* certainly make themselves wings; they fly away as an eagle toward heaven." The sinful pleasures of this world never last long, and hell is forever. Our sinful flesh then is like a wild horse that can never be tamed. Proverbs 27:20 says, "Hell and destruction are never full; so the eyes of man are never satisfied."

When we are tempted by the tug and pull of our flesh to let loose and run wild, with all our might we should resist these temptations lest they consume us. The grass always looks greener on the other side, but it never really is. Instead of looking and lusting after all that God has forbidden, we should set our spiritual eyes upon Christ and the Father's will. True happiness can only be found in communion with God our Father, living in His Kingdom by faith. Jesus never gave in to any temptation of sin, rather His joy was always found obeying His Father. Jesus said, "My meat is to do the will of Him that sent Me, and to finish His work." Jesus' work was finished when He suffered upon the cross, paying the penalty of our sin. When we by faith remember this great love of our Good Shepherd, this is where true happiness and joy in our redemption. Jesus said, "Ye now therefore have sorrow: but I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you."

Returning now to the young man, after everything was gone and he began to hunger, he finally got a job. Hunger is the best employer. But now he was so far down at the bottom of society, the best he could do was feed pigs for a little money, and it was not enough. Finally he came to his senses and said, "I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son." Oh what a great blessing it is, when God works by various

means to bring us to that low estate where God empties our pride. Whenever God thus grants us those hungry days where we are in want, let us not despise God but thank Him with all our heart, for only the hungry can be filled. "Oh that *men* would praise the LORD *for* his goodness, and *for* his wonderful works to the children of men! For he satisfieth the longing soul, and filleth the hungry soul with goodness." Ps. 107

II. The mercies of our Father. Turning now from the penitent son to the merciful father, no doubt the father earnestly prayed for his lost son, "Gracious Lord, grant repentance to my youngest son! Wake up his soul to the knowledge of his sins, but only so Thy great mercy will shine upon Him, and he will be saved!" That is how all Christian parents should pray when their own believing children turn their back on Jesus by unbelief. With Jesus there is always hope! Rest assured this father daily prayed for his son's repentance, yet this prayer was only based upon God's great mercy. We cannot turn our children back to God, but God alone can turn them. Only the Good Shepherd can seek out and save that which was lost. "For ye were as sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls.

Knowing his gracious God, this earthly father never gave up hope, but kept watching and waiting and praying daily for the son's return. By God's grace that day came and he saw it. Even from a distance he saw his son returning. His great heart opened wide to receive him. And notice the son did not go running to the father, but the father ran to the son! So great was his love and mercy toward the fallen. "Father I have sinned against heaven and in thy sight and am no more worthy to be called thy son". These are the words of a broken and contrite heart, namely a heart that is empty of any worthiness in God's sight. Likewise we Christians are certainly not worthy of being children of God, yet our Father has opened wide to us His arms of mercy, by His Son whose arms were opened wide on the cross. No matter what we've done, no matter how often we have shamefully indulged our flesh, God will through Christ receive us if only we confess our sin! "Him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out" for "The LORD *is* nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit."

When we thus see the father running to his son, embracing his son, shedding tears upon the son, even slaying the fatted calf, these are unmistakable signs not only that the father forgives the son, but also that the father receives the son back again as an heir. Jesus would by this picture help all who are sorry for their sins, to see how happy God the Father is to forgive you and receive you again as His own dear child. When the father tenderly kisses the son, and when his tears fall upon him, you can remember your own baptism, where the tears of God were poured upon your head to wash away your sins, and with a kiss of grace He put His own holy name upon you, calling you His own dear child. Likewise when this earthly father was joyful and he slew the fatted calf providing a feast,

consider the heavenly feast God gives you in Holy Communion, so you taste and eat the sweet feast of your Father's forgiveness. YES INDEED, you and I are unworthy sons, but the Father still claims us as His own dear children, and He has written His name upon our little head and heart. By the sign of the cross we are yet heirs of heaven. "If children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with *him*, that we may be also glorified together." Through the precious blood of Christ we have "an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you."

III. The obedient yet jealous son. Our last point for the day concerns the older and jealous son, who resented all the happiness and joy of the father over the prodigal son. After all, who was it that stayed home and did all the work? He didn't squander his father's inheritance, and when was a party thrown for him? To this the father softly answered, "Son, that art ever with me and all that I have is thine, it was meet that we should make merry and be glad: for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found."

By such words Jesus Himself is teaching us the great joy God the Father has over one sinner who repents. "I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance." When God grants repentance to the lost sheep who enjoyed the pleasures of sin for a season, there is no call for anger or jealousy in the heart. When God pours out His grace upon any lost soul, there should only be joy and happiness, for our brother was dead but now is alive! Joy, joy, joy! Thank God then dear Christian, God forgives all those times we have sought in our hearts to justify ourselves by our works rather than God's grace. Through the blood of this only-begotten Son, God forgives you (and me) for being a Pharisee. He forgive you (and me) of all our pride and self-righteousness, and though we be unworthy servants, God through the Son gives us a wonderful promise which fades not away, "Son, that art ever with Me, and all that I have is thine." Amen.