

Trinity 3 - St. Luke 15:11-24
Our Father is Prodigal with Grace

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We pray: Dear Father, We have not only strayed from Your ways like lost sheep, but we have fled from You like prodigal lost children. We have followed the devices and desires of our hearts. We have done those things which we should not have done, and we have not done those things which we should have done. Have mercy upon us, O Lord. Spare us and restore us as Your children, according to the promises You have declared to us in Jesus Christ, our Lord. For His sake grant that we may live a godly, righteous, and sober life, to the glory of Your holy name. Amen. (Confession of Sin, Matins ELH p. 109, alt.)

*In the name of the Father and of the ☩ Son and of the Holy Spirit,
Who shows undue love and lavishly forgives, my fellow redeemed,*

In a moment, we're going to hear the parable often referred to as "The Parable of the Prodigal Son."

It was only a few years ago when I learned that a prodigal is actually a squanderer, a reckless spendthrift. I had always thought it meant something about the son being incorrigible, or rebellious, or alienated.

It's unfortunate that whoever labeled the parable didn't at least connect it with the two previous parables to which it's obviously connected (Lost Sheep/Lost Coin). He could have called it the parable of "The Lost Son," or better yet, "The Lost Sons."

But it's even more unfortunate that whoever it was, didn't label any of them according to Jesus' emphasis. So where was Jesus' focus? Listen for it as we hear our text ...

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We read as follows in Jesus' name.

And he said, "There was a man who had two sons. And the younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of property that is coming to me.' And he divided his property between them. Not many days later, the younger son gathered all he had and took a journey into a far country, and there he squandered his property in reckless living. And when he had spent everything, a severe famine arose in that country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed pigs. And he was longing to be fed with the pods that the pigs ate, and no one gave him anything.

"But when he came to himself, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have more than enough bread, but I perish here with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants."' And he arose and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' But the father said to his servants, 'Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet. And bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate. For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.' And they began to celebrate. (ESV) So far the Words of our text.

These are Your words, heavenly Father.

Sanctify [us] in the truth. Your Word is truth. (John 17:17)

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So where was Jesus' focus?

Was it on the son, or his lostness, or his spending habits?

It wasn't, was it?

Sadly the experience of young people wanting to break free from their parent's control and influence isn't too shocking. Even the brash demand for their "share" isn't unheard of. The son's story of reckless & senseless living isn't uncommon. Nor are the harsh consequences that came upon him.

But what is uncommon, even shocking, is the father's response. The father is wasteful, with his own possessions and his love.

He divided his property between them.

The son wasn't going to invest it for the good of the family.

He knew his goods would be wasted by the son.

And after the son returns from **devouring his property**, (vs.30)

he gives him the best robe, a ring, shoes,

and throws an extravagant party with the fattened calf.

The son wasn't even looking for this kind of treatment;

he thought it enough just to be hired back as a servant,

hoping, perhaps, to work his way back into Father's favor.

And yet, the father lavished his prodigal, lost, dead son with more goodness, receiving him as his son, not a servant.

To the listeners in Jesus' day, this would have been outrageous. What human father would do this?

This is no way to keep the rest of the children in line.

Soon all of them would be taking advantage of him.

Where was the extravagant shaming?

Or since he liked to travel, the long guilt trip,

or, at least one out behind the wood shed?

Where was the "Don't ever do that again!" speech?

Where was the justice and the repayment plan?

But this is exactly Jesus' point. God, our Father, is not like us.

His grace is outrageous. His forgiveness is complete...

and it's not even motivated by our repentance

or our promises to do better.

And that's great news! because we need that kind

of prodigal grace for our prodigal failures of sin.

Could you hear Jesus speaking this parable to you today?

How fitting that He used a parable about a dysfunctional family.

Our families feel these stings and scars, don't they?

It's okay, you can admit it to yourself here, it's safe.

Infinitely better yet, you can confess it here before God.

You don't have to try to keep up the "picture-perfect family" routine here.

To pretend otherwise is a sign of dysfunction.

Don't worry, even those other families that seem to have it all worked out, they have their difficulties, too.

How do I know? Their family is made up of sinners, too.

We're all sinners. And we're all here for the same reason.

Our families have failed us in many and various ways.

And we've all failed our families.

... We have squandered our Father's gracious gift of family.

I doubt I need to go too deep into giving examples of this in our lives today.

You probably have a laundry list of things that plague your conscience.

Things you wish you could go back and re-do.

The disrespectful way you spoke to your father or mother.

What you said to your sibling that has estranged you.

The grudge that you hold, though you are realizing its harm.

How you angrily disciplined when compassion was proper.

Poor habits or unsavory personality traits you fail to curb.

We squander our time with family.

Present in body, but absent in mind or spirit.
Paying attention to the TV, phone, computer, tablet screen,
While ignoring the son, daughter or grandchild's scream
for attention.
Or being completely absent due to excessive work,
family breakups, or careless time management.
Squandering your time with grudges rather than forgiveness.

You try to make it up with more squandering,
spoiling them in other ways.
You lavish them with inordinate gifts,
You bribe them to forgive you with promises to do better.
Your excessive guilt leads you to withhold due discipline,
after all, who are you to judge? You did the same things.
But far from improving the situation, it only gets worse.

...
You see, it's not only this son who is prodigal, is it? It's you too.
But squandering is actually just the symptom of the problem.
As the father said, his son was lost. He was dead in sin.
The sinful nature in us would have us defy our Father.
To demand your portion of the good life now,
peace in your family regardless of what it costs Him...
in the capital of eternal human life.
To leave His family, if necessary, to go get lost in life,
far away from Him and His Church, His family...
To excuse yourself and your family from His table...
To defile yourself with the unclean, unsanctified family
lifestyles of this world...
But this is death, spiritual leading to eternal death.
And if you have a family, and you neglect God's family,
you would take them with you... away from Him.

As we already pointed out, this is not the shocking thing.
This is normal, even natural, in our sinful condition.
The shocking thing is the Father's prodigal grace.
His lavish forgiveness. His undue love.
The kind that longs for his rebellious son's return,
and shamelessly runs out to meet him,
that unabashedly sends His only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ,
to serve Him in complete perfection and obedience,
then runs Him to the cross to spill His blood,
so that He might receive you as His child
and clothe you with the best God has to offer,
the robe of Jesus' righteous obedience.

This grace seemed to be wasted on the child who took it
for granted and squandered it, but what was it that
brought the son to his senses, if not His father's grace.
If the father was a harsh, loveless, grudge-holding man,
the son never would have thought about returning.
But he felt safe that he would be welcomed back,
and thought it advantageous even to be his servant.

My fellow children of God,
if the reason that you come to your Father's house this week,
is because you are His servant, working your way back
into His good favor, even bringing your family with you,
then know this: He will not receive you that way.
He will not squander His relationship with you
by treating you as a servant, a slave.

He has already made you His child in Baptism.
He's already washed away the rags of sin against your family...
But I suppose you already knew that.
That's why you're here, isn't it. It is His lavish, reckless grace
that has emboldened you to come once more,

confessing that you've sinned before heaven and Him.
He has forgiven you already. He will do it again.
Not so you can take advantage of Him,
But so you can take advantage of His Son.
He has killed the Sacrifice, and sets Him before you.
His perfect life is in the bread, His body, given for you.
His sacrificial death is in the wine, His blood, shed for you.
Shed for you for the forgiveness of your sins...
Shed for you for the strength to forgive your family...
Shed for you to enable you to resist temptations
to squander the precious treasure that is your family.
This is a time for celebration. This is a time to feast on Him.
For you were lost, but He has found you and receives you.
For you were dead, but He has given you life.

His grace is lavish, but it is not wasteful.
Each and every lost son or daughter who is found,
is worth every drop of Jesus' blood,
and is totally worth the reputation of being the Father
who is prodigal with His grace.
*Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit
as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be forever more.
Soli Deo Gloria*