

Text: Luke 15:11-32

¹¹ Jesus said: "There was a man who had two sons. ¹² The younger one said to his father, 'Father, give me my share of the estate.' So he divided his property between them. ¹³ "Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living. ¹⁴ After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. ¹⁵ So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. ¹⁶ He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything. ¹⁷ "When he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired men have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! ¹⁸ I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. ¹⁹ I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired men.' ²⁰ So he got up and went to his father. "But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him. ²¹ "The son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' ²² "But the father said to his servants, 'Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. ²³ Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. ²⁴ For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' So they began to celebrate. ²⁵ "Meanwhile, the older son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. ²⁶ So he called one of the servants and asked him what was going on. ²⁷ 'Your brother has come,' he replied, 'and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.' ²⁸ "The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him. ²⁹ But he answered his father, 'Look! All these years I've been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. ³⁰ But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!' ³¹ "'My son,' the father said, 'you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. ³² But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' " – NIV84

Prayer of the Day:

Almighty God, we confess that we deserve to be punished for our evil deeds. But we ask you graciously to cleanse us from all sin and to comfort us with your salvation; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen!

Verse of the Day:

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. (John 3:16)

Sermon Text:

To you who through the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ have received a faith as precious as the apostles. Grace and peace be yours in abundance through the knowledge of God and of Jesus Christ our Lord. (2 Peter 1:1-2) Amen!

The parable of the Prodigal (or Lost) Son, that's the name so often given to the words of our Gospel Lesson today. But I would venture to say that if we focus only on this one character in this particular parable of Jesus, we have missed two-thirds of what is going on and perhaps skirted over the most important part of this profound parable. As always, it's an incredibly deep lesson that Jesus sets before us

and forces us, if read properly, to ponder who we are even as we rejoice in the love which God so freely displays. So without much further ado let's dive into the parable even as we ponder the title. Is it really about the **TWO SONS AND THE AMAZING LOVE OF THE FATHER?**

The prodigal son is well known. So well known that we usually use the words to refer to any wayward child. Johnny is a bit of the prodigal son of the family. But the son in our parable is ever so much more than a trouble-making kid. Jesus tells us, *"There was a man who had two sons. ¹² The younger one said to his father, 'Father, give me my share of the estate.' So he divided his property between them. ¹³ 'Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living."* The older son later is not afraid to fill in some of the sorted details for us *But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!'*

What's all going on here? I think it's easy to miss some of the seriousness of what this young man is doing. Inheritance in Jesus' day wasn't just about stuff. The older son would usually have received a bit more than the other sons because the inheritance was designed to help and support the entire family. The sons then would become caretakers of mom, unmarried sisters, the servants who had been hired to work, and of course the family business. Until death, such a thing was completely unnecessary because the father would be taking care of the needs of the family.

So in effect, the younger son is disavowing the family, looking dad straight in the eye and saying what amounts to "Dad, I wish you were dead! Give me my fair share so I can split and be done with you." Just imagine the hurt that would have washed over this father as the son no longer wanted anything to do with him or the rest of the family. To call this rude is an understatement! It is a complete and total betrayal and a shattering of the Fourth Commandment this pious Father had no doubt repeatedly tried to instill.

To make matters worse, he travels off to some far-off land and blows it on wild living. Compounding the sins committed at home with a complete destruction of the 6th Commandment at least so is the accusation of the older brother. But of intrigue is perhaps the real meaning of prodigal. It comes from the Greek word translated "wild" for us and both really seem to focus on not only "wild" as in "crazy sinful" but on "excess" or "extravagance". This young man does it up and wants to live like a king and as he does the treasures and pleasures of life pull him away from the solid foundation given and laid by the Father at home.

Dear Christian Friends, I pray you have never wished your parents dead to their faces but then in teenage angst and the heat of argument silly things sure do fire out from our mouths. And while I certainly would hope you aren't going broke on and risking your health with something as disdainful as prostitution, Satan certainly is good at coming up with a million different ways to lead us astray from the Sixth Commandment which is designed to protect the precious gift of marriage. Sex before marriage, living together before marriage, pornography, crude joking, well, it's just dipping our toe into the water of what our world would call fine and good for any heterosexual individual or otherwise these days. But even if these sins have all been avoided, we live in America and excess and largess well, "Go big or go home," right? And is success judged by the strength of our faith and fervor with which we hold it out or is it quantified by bank accounts, paychecks, and the stuff piled high within our closets? Does our pursuit of it, choke out the time we would spend with God, slowly chipping away at the solid foundation given by our Heavenly Father and quietly stating that gold and not God is the most important thing in life for all who look in?

Oh, but there is perhaps a more insidious threat in our lesson than all of this! The older son doesn't appear until the end of our lesson. He has been dutiful, faithful, hardworking even in the face of the loss of the younger brother who broke his Father's heart and took off with money needed for the day-to-day life and work which continued in his absence. He had been there to console, to shore up, and to get it done. He was a good guy, a loving son. But when the younger brother returned. Sin was present even here.

Pride rears its head! *'Look! All these years I've been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. ³⁰ But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!'*

The older son is hurt. Why? He has been doing so much, has been so much in support of the Father but, in his estimation, he has not benefited from it at all, and now when this good for nothing who disavowed the family and disgraced its name comes back, the father is going to spend his hard-earned money on him? It's not wise! It's not just! It's not fair!! There are the words, dangerous words, prideful words that think we are owed for our actions anything other than the fires of hell for our sin-stained rags offered up to heaven. Such words lack forgiveness! Such words lack love! Such words are focused only on self. Have such words ever come from your mouth? Aimed at a parent, at a teacher, at a boss, at a coworker? Spoken behind a back?

The parable of the prodigal son or the sinful sons is a cautionary tale for the Christian to consider carefully no doubt. One son is left destitute, extravagance giving way to poverty. The other well pride has led to a different kind of poverty altogether and perhaps even more dangerous for the one crumbles in repentance caused by his worldly lack and want while the other, well I'd like to think he came to his senses after his Father spoke to him but we simply are not told.

But then I said that there were three people we needed to consider today and one remains. Focus now on the one who is both offended and offense. Focus on the Father. There is really only one word that accurately describes the actions of the Father in this parable. It's the reason that we might say that it's really the Father who should be the focal point throughout the story. For in the actions of the Father, we see amazing love, grace upon grace!

Go back to the prodigal even in the ugliness of his sin, the Father sets Himself aside and divides the estate. No doubt, hoping for what ultimately occurs, that His son would come to his senses and return, even without the costly lesson which leads him to repentance. And when the son comes back, it would have been so easy to meet him with the hostility harbored by the older son but instead, while that prodigal is still a long way off the father does the unexpected and runs to greet him! This sinful son doesn't even get all the words out from his prepared speech so overcome is he by the grace the Father lavishes on him. Who then kills (the Greek is "sacrifices") the fattened calf for him.

The older son is offended by this lavish grace so freely given, pouting and throwing his own little pity party outside having succumbed to the devilish selfishness and pride which would manufacture wounds where there are none. Again, what does the Father do? It's a sentence often overlooked but once more so full of grace, *So his father went out and pleaded with him.* His words ooze not only wisdom but grace again, " *'My son,' the father said, 'you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. ³² But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.'* "

And so it is with us, dear friends. Whether prodigal or prideful, in this season of Lent as God's law breaks us under its unimaginable weight, breaks us because of the evil we have done, breaks us because we have chased the excess of the world around us or because we bought into the lies that we deserve more or even anything at all, your Heavenly Father comes running and has always done so. He was willing to sacrifice far more than a fattened calf, as the blood of Jesus purifies us from every sin. He throws His arms around us, calms our aggravated hearts, and showers us with the kisses of His love in His holy Word and Sacraments that we might live in the forgiveness He so freely provides. Yes, though my sin may leave me destitute, God's lavish grace abounds and pulls me from death to life.

Ah, the parable of the Prodigal Son, it's an incredibly deep lesson that Jesus sets before us. It forces us, if read properly, to ponder who we are even as we rejoice in the love which God so freely displays. I can't change the titles already written in your Bibles, but if I could perhaps better than the **PRODIGAL SON**, better than the **PRIDEFUL BROTHER**, would be **TWO SONS AND THE AMAZING LOVE OF THE FATHER!** Amen.