

4<sup>th</sup> S. in Lent                    3/27/22  
Luke 15:1-3, 11-32            C

## APPOINTED GOSPEL LESSON TODAY, FROM THE 15<sup>TH</sup> CHAPTER OF LUKE'S GOSPEL

“There was a man who had two sons.” That’s how Jesus begins the well-known parable before us this morning. And while the two sons get most of our attention, we take note of the wonderful truth Jesus is teaching us in the parable this morning. Like the Father who had compassion on his prodigal son and his self-righteous oldest son, the Good News of the Gospel is God is our COMPASSIONATE FATHER.

Our attention is always focused on that younger son. He went to his father one day and said, “Father, give me the share of the property that is coming to me” (v. 12). Only one little issue with that – Dad is still very much alive. Make no mistake about it, what that younger son is saying is, “You’re dead to me, Dad! I want nothing to do with you. Give me my stuff, so I can be on my way.”

So, Dad does. He divides his property, we assume according to the custom of the day: 1/3 to the younger son and 2/3 of his estate to the older son.

And with that money burning a hole in his pocket, the younger son goes to live the dream. It was Vegas, Spring break, Sodom and Gomorrah all rolled into one. And it wasn’t long before he was dead broke. He hit rock bottom and kept going. To add insult to injury, a famine hit the land and this good Jewish boy soon found himself feeding pigs. “And he was longing to be fed with the pods the pigs ate, and no one gave him anything” (v. 16).

In direct contrast, while the younger brother was squandering his property in reckless living, the older brother stayed home, worked hard, and endeavored to do everything right.

Then, comes the day. The younger brother, weighed down by grief and shame, humbles himself to come home to plead before his father, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called you son. Treat me as one of your hired servants” (vv. 18-19). His compassionate father sees him, and note that he didn’t wait for his son to bow down and beg and plead. Dad runs to him, embraces him, and yells 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” (vv. 22-23).

And there watching all of it is the older brother. He doesn’t rejoice that his little brother is home. Quite the contrary. He’s filled with anger. Self-pity. In his self-righteousness indignation, he says to his father, “These many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command, yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might celebrate with my friends” (v. 29).

Which of the two brothers are you? Maybe you are the younger son who said to God, I will take all the blessings you have for me. And, BTW, you are dead to me. It’s my life, and I will live my life, as a prodigal in drunkenness, sexual immorality, gossiping, coveting, stealing. After all, I love myself more than anything, and I will do what I want to do so I can feel good about myself. And when it’s all said and done at the end of the day, maybe you’ve never hit rock bottom, but that looking out for # 1 has only left you weighed down by guilt and shame.

Or, maybe you're the older brother. The one who stayed home, worked hard, and endeavored to do everything right. You look at your works and life and think the Father should be impressed by you, and should you reward you for what you've done ... and what you have not done. After all, you didn't squander your inheritance in prodigal living. Your looking out for # 1 has made you think you're better than others, so you look down your nose at those ... well, those sinners.

These 2 sons may seem like opposites, but their sin is actually the same. Both sons believe that their father's love is based on who they are and what they do. Since the prodigal has disgraced his father, he is convinced that his father would not love him; since the other son has worked so hard, he is convinced that his father should love him more for his efforts.

In speaking of the two brothers, Jesus points out the sins of both the younger brother and the older brother. We often call this the parable of the Prodigal Son, but I think it should be called the Parable of the Compassionate Father. Jesus does not just tell the parable to showcase the wretchedness of sinners; He tells it also to declare the compassion of the Father, "who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth (1 Tm 2)."

II. God so loved us, that He sent His only-begotten Son to a far country. That Son took on human flesh, and was nailed to the cross for you. There, we see the compassion of our Heavenly Father. He sends His own Son to the cross, instead of you. Upon that cross, Jesus suffered, bled, and died, for both of those brothers, for you, for all sins, so that you, Dear Child of God, are sins forgiven.

Look at the words of Isaiah in our Old Testament reading. He writes that though God was angry with us, His anger is turned away -- it was turned away upon His Son for you, in your place. The Apostle Paul says it this way in our Epistle, "[God] made Him to be sin who knew no sin, that in Him we might become the righteousness of God".

III. When the Son of God went to a far country, He made the compassion of the Father known in welcoming sinners. When He encountered lepers, Jesus received them, healed them, and restored them. Once, He met an adulterous woman at a Samaritan well. The Savior did not recoil because of her nationality or her scandalous lifestyle. On the contrary, Jesus received this woman, witnessed the love of God to her and granted her a new lease on temporal and eternal life

He received a dinner invitation from the tax collector Zacchaeus, and, by the end of the evening, was glad to announce, "Today, salvation has come to this house" (Luke 19:9). Jesus received a thieving sinner who hung beside Him on the cross. Even though the Savior's hands were nailed to Calvary's cross, He still managed to snatch that repentant soul from of the grasp of Satan. A resurrected Jesus received a denying disciple like Peter; deserting students like Andrew and James; a doubting sinner like Thomas. His hands, torn by Roman nails, forgave them their fears and sins, and received them back into friendship, freedom, and faith. To them Jesus said, "Do not doubt, but believe" (John 20:27).

When you think about it, the Pharisees and scribes were right in what they said. Jesus did receive sinners; and the Good News for us is that He still does today. He received you as His child in Baptism and continues His work of bringing you to repentance so that you sorrow for your sin, believe in Jesus for forgiveness, and die to sin, so that you have no desire for it.

Jesus gives you a new life filled with forgiveness, a life lifted up by hope. He welcomes you into His kingdom, puts a robe upon your back and a ring upon your finger; breathes His eternal life into you and feeds you with His life-giving Body and Blood, and rewards you with the crown of righteousness when you depart this vale of tears.

We are equally sinful before God. But, the Good News of the Christian faith is that God is our Compassionate Father who receives us in Jesus.