

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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Third Sunday In Lent, March 15, 2020

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 324:1-5, 321:1, 318, 325, 373:7.

Lessons: Proverbs 13:25, 1 Timothy 6:6-19, Luke 15:1-10.

Sermon Text: Luke 15:11-32.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Look at the foolish young man! He wanted it all, he took it and look what it got him! But doesn't that part of his life make us think of ourselves? Isn't that kind of like all of us? "I want it. I want it all. I want it now. I want to do it my way."

This parable has been called the "Parable of the Prodigal Son", or the "Parable of the Lost Son," and even the "Parable of the Father's Love". A dictionary would define prodigal as recklessly wasteful. A parable, remember, is an earthly story with spiritual truth, an earthly story with a heavenly meaning. Today, let's examine the idea of

GOD'S JOY OVER REPENTANT SINNERS

- 1. One young man learned the hard way that sin takes over wherever it can.**
- 2. Hard times led him to repentance,**
- 3. But not everyone recognized and rejoiced in his repentance.**

The son wanted it all. He felt entitled. *"There was a man who had two sons. The younger one said to his father, 'Father, give me my share of the estate.' So he divided his property between them."* It was not wrong in itself for this young man to request his share of the estate of his father. What was wrong was what he did after he got his inheritance. *"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."*

His attitude becomes a problem for so many of us today. Aren't we all really like that young man? For whatever reason, we may think "we deserve it" or "we deserve to take time for ourselves" or "we need our leisure" or even "we've worked hard for it."

So the father gave him his inheritance. The father gave it all to him. In this father in the parable, we can see a picture of God our Father in heaven, who gives us all we need and much more.

During the Lenten season, the Scripture lessons typically seem to emphasize contrition and repentance, repentance from sin. And they also emphasize forgiveness for sin. In the Lenten season, the 40 days leading up to Jesus dying on the cross and rising again on the third day, the lessons especially remind us of our sins and seek to remind us of why Jesus died. They especially seek to work repentance and faith in the forgiveness of sins.

So in this young man we see the natural tendency in all of us – in fact, in all of mankind – to want to get away from our heavenly Father, even though the Father gives it all to us – far more than we deserve because of our innate sinfulness and our on-going sins.

But in looking at the young man, we can ask ourselves: what are our goals? What kind of use do we make of all the possessions God has so graciously given us? What kind of use do we make of all the skills and gifts and abilities God has given us? God wants us to use the gifts he has given us for the furtherance of his kingdom.

But aren't the goals of so many in the world just worldly and selfish? Have fun! Live it up! Get all you can out of life! There is always the temptation to put something first, before God in our lives.

Remember the First Commandment of God? "You shall have no other gods. What does this mean? We should fear, love, and trust in God above all things." But how do we plan our lives, and even the next day and week

of our lives? What do we want for our lives? Isn't wealth – money and possessions – one of the first things on our list? And to gain wealth, the world says 'get a good education so you can make lots of money and get all the things you want.' The world says 'don't waste your time on religion!' And where does God fit into our goals and plans? Maybe as young people we want to get away from our parents. Do you think it is possible that in his past life the young man in the parable had probably made jokes about his father as a strict old man? Mark Twain once wrote "When I was a boy of 14, my father was so ignorant I could hardly stand to have the old man around. But when I got to be 21, I was astonished at how much the old man had learned in seven years." Isn't that the arrogance of youth?

So where does God really fit into your goals and plans? Where does God fit into your plans today, after you spend an hour – or two if you came to Bible class – with his Word? Doesn't it happen that we are willing to grant God maybe an hour on Sunday – but not much more than an hour, because we have things we want to do?

The father in the parable gave the son what he wanted – everything he needed – and more. And look at what good it did! The son left his father and all that he had known and ***“set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living. After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything. 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!’”***

The Son had to hit rock bottom. Now he realized what a mess he had made of his life, and longed for the good things he had once had. His heart was now filled with contrition, sincere sorrow over his sins. Now he came to repentance. Just how this happens in the life of a person may often vary according to outward circumstances. But one thing is sure: the Law of God produces contrition, sorrow for sin, and the Gospel of Christ is the powerful word to work faith in Christ and trust in God's grace and mercy for the Savior's sake.

Maybe we don't hit rock bottom like the prodigal son. Maybe we don't end up homeless, or with nothing to eat but animal food. But aren't there many times that because of our sins we are down, disappointed, depressed, or think that nothing is going well for us? Aren't there times when we think that we lack attention from those who say they love us?

But the prodigal did hit rock bottom. Feeding pigs was the lowest work imaginable for a Jew. And he was not even given pig food to eat!

This is a picture of every sinner, and especially of a deeply fallen sinner. Some have fallen more deeply into the mire of sinful living than others. But all of us have gone astray from our heavenly Father. Isaiah describes us well when he says: ***“We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way.”*** Isaiah 53:6 (NIV)

This parable is also a clear warning to all young people – and really, to all people – who are tempted to indulge in the sinful ways of the unbelievers, and don't want to listen to God's Word. That kind of life can only end up in misery and disaster.

It is really a very precious blessing when such a sinner becomes penitent and acknowledges his sin.

Have you been so wrapped up in your life that you've forgotten your heavenly Father's love, and the love of your Christian family? Do we really "need it all?" Remember that God tells us ***“having food and raiment let us be therewith content.”*** 1 Timothy 6:8 (KJV) In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus tells us: ***“seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and [food and drink and clothing] will be given to you as well.”*** Matthew 6:33 (NIV)

Yes, you do have a Christian family, even if they don't always seem to act that way, or if they sometimes act contrary to their confession. In a moment we will look at the older brother, who didn't behave like part of the Christian family of believers.

The prodigal son was wrapped up in his wickedness. For us we might also be wrapped up in our own separation from God – from our not hearing or reading God's Word, and may not even realize it.

Then we see the young man's repentance. He remembered his father's love. ***“I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired men.’ So he got up and went to his father.”***

The Father rejoiced to see him! We need to hear this parable because it is an example of how every fallen sinner who repents is received again because of the heavenly Father's grace in Christ. Notice the heavenly father's love for the sinner who comes to repentance.

The Father had given him everything, and now he gave him even more!

Our heavenly Father rejoices to see repentance and the fruits of repentance.

In our gospel lesson, we heard about the lost sheep who was found, and the silver coin which was found. You also heard Jesus' words in our Gospel lessons tell us: **"In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents."** Luke 11:15 (NIV)

The prodigal son made an unconditional confession: **"Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired men."** His arrogant pride was gone. He was too deeply conscious of his sins to think that he could now be received again as a son. He was content to be like a hired man. True penitence, then, consists in openly confessing our sins and humbly trusting in the Father's mercy. David writes: **"The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise."** Psalm 51:17 (NIV) The Book of Proverbs also says: **"He who conceals his sins does not prosper, but whoever confesses and renounces them finds mercy."** Proverbs 28:13 (NIV)

To all of us who are ashamed of our past sins, the hymn writer encourages us, saying: "Today Thy mercy calls us To wash away our sin. However great our trespass, Whatever we have been, However long from mercy Our hearts have turned away, Thy precious blood can cleanse us And make us white today." (The Lutheran Hymnal 297:1)

So we see the father's amazing love for the penitent sinner, which is plainly a picture of our heavenly Father's love for us.

But not all was well in this family. There was a cloud in this parable. The older brother found no joy in his brother's repentance. When he found out what was happening, he **"became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him. 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. But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!'"** Don't we all want to pat ourselves on the back and think and even say 'see what a good boy am I'! It is so easy to think of ourselves as better than others. But any unrepented sin condemns to hell! This brother was filled with the sin of self-righteousness. He thought he was better than his younger brother.

Do we rejoice at the repentance of a fellow Christian? Do we welcome with open arms one who is penitent? Or do we have a different attitude over repentance than this father and our heavenly Father have? In the older brother we find self-righteousness.

And sadly, because of our sin of self-righteousness, we don't always find joy in one another, and especially joy in repentance within our visible Christian family.

But we must all bow before God. We should not act like the older brother of the prodigal son who refused to acknowledge his brother's repentance. Instead we should rejoice, just as the angels rejoice over one sinner who repents. We should rejoice, and confirm our love to the one who was lost, and is found again. We should not exalt ourselves above him, thinking that such things could never happen to us, but rather be warned **"So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!"** 1 Corinthians 10:12 (NIV) We must remember that **"all our righteous acts are like filthy rags."** Isaiah 64:6 (NIV)

Unless we realize this, we cannot appreciate how wonderful it will be to stand before the Lord with pure white robes on judgment day. We confess with David: **"Surely I have been a sinner from birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me."** Ps. 51:5 These words remind us of the fact that we have sinned against God in our thoughts and words and deeds. They remind us that we have broken God's commandments; that we have done what he said we shouldn't do; and that we have not done what he says we should do. The fact is that we have to rightfully confess with the prodigal son: **"Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son."** Luke 15:21

With the hymn-writer we plead: "Show us, Lord, the path of blessing; When we trespass on our way, Cast, O Lord, our sins behind Thee And be with us day by day. Should we stray, O Lord, recall; Work repentance when we fall." (The Lutheran Hymnal, 226:3)

For every one of us penitent sinners, our heavenly Father will say: **"For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found."**

May this parable not only warn us of the sins of self-righteousness, but may it remind us of the joys of contrition, repentance and forgiveness! Lord, remind us from your Word daily that our sins are forgiven! Amen.