

Immanuel (Augsburg) Lutheran Church
Shobonier, Illinois
Lent 4C
March 27, 2022
Luke 15:1-3, 11-32
The Prodigal

Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him. 2 And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, "This man receives sinners and eats with them." 3 So he told them this parable: (Luke 15:1-3 ESV)

Dearly Beloved in Christ:

During the season of Lent, we hear repeatedly that the Christian life is all about repentance. Such a life is concerned only with turning from sin to faith in Christ. With such a faith, one will struggle and fight against sin in all its forms in his life. And when a sinner repents, there is much rejoicing in heaven. But when Jesus is rejected, there is no repentance and there is no rejoicing over repentance. Truly a sad state of affairs.

Today we hear Jesus' parable of the prodigal son. You've heard it before. You know the story. But have you ever thought about what it means to be prodigal? The dictionary defines it as "wastefully extravagant." It's easy to see how it describes the younger son in Jesus' parable, but there is more prodigality here than just him. But he is a good place to start.

This younger son asked his father to give him his share of the property. Since that would ordinarily happen only when the father died, the son, in effect, says, "Dad, drop dead. I want what's mine and I want it now." But aside from the audacity and rudeness of the son, what's even more surprising, is that the father did what he asked, or, rather, demanded. He gave him his share of the property. How wastefully extravagant!

And that son turned it into cash and went off to a far country and "squandered his property in reckless living." We don't know exactly what he did, but we can be sure that he wasted it foolishly and lavishly, living only for the moment, not thinking at all about what he was doing or the consequences thereof.

When a severe famine arose in that country, he didn't have money to buy food. He was desperate. So he hired himself out to a farmer to feed his pigs. Remember, now, that Jesus is telling this to the scribes and Pharisees. Nothing would have been more abhorrent to a Jew than having anything to do with pigs. Even then, he was miserable and suffered great hunger.

Finally, when he came to his senses, he determined to return home to his father. After all, even his father's servants had plenty to eat. So he hatched a plan to return home, confess his sins, and ask to be treated as a servant. After all, he couldn't envision being welcomed as a son, not after what he'd done. Getting a job working for his father was the best he could hope for.

What he could never have imagined, though, was the reception he received from his father. You see, his father hadn't gone after him, trying to get him to stay. The father hadn't kept track of him and bailed him out when he needed it. No, the father had let him go. At the same time, the father was waiting and watching for his wayward son to return. While the son was a long way off, his father saw him and came running. He hugged him and kissed him. The son confessed his sin, and that he was not worthy to be his son. But he never got to stating his conditions.

His prodigal father was wasteful and extravagant as he received his son with joy, commanding the servants to bring the best robe, put a ring on his finger, and shoes on his feet. Dad welcomed him home as a son! Dad forgave him. And then, dad threw a banquet, even killing the fattened calf. His son who was dead is alive again. He son who was lost is found. Repentance had to be celebrated!

But the father's prodigality wasn't done yet. For he had an older son to deal with.

That son, coming home from the field, heard the music and dancing. And when he was told that his brother was home and his father had welcomed him, he was incensed. How could he do that?!?! He couldn't even call his brother "his brother." He called him "this son of yours." But aside from his brother's return, he was upset because dad had never done anything for him. "Look, 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." He thought all his hard work had been for nothing. Indeed, he saw himself as a servant and not a son. He thought his status with his father depended on his work, his obedience, his self-righteousness. He had wasted his father's love for him and the great blessings that were his. He doesn't seem to remember that everything there was his.

So his father comes out to him and begs him to come in. But he would not! This older son was just as lost as his brother had been, but he didn't know it. Yet, the father reminded him, "Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours." Did you hear that? Despite his older son's behavior, the father still calls him "Son." Even his son's rotten attitude and behavior didn't keep the father from loving him as a son. That's the radical, prodigal nature of the father's love.

Now, remember, Jesus told this parable to the scribes and Pharisees who grumbled that Jesus welcomed sinners and ate with them. You see, they were so intent on keeping the law, at least they thought they were, and condemning others who didn't, they didn't realize the heavenly joy over every sinner who turns from his sin, turns to the Lord Jesus, and looks to Him alone for forgiveness and salvation. To them, it was a scandal. Yet, what they say of Jesus is true - He does receive sinners and eats with them. And it's good for us to hear that again and again because it is the story of our salvation.

So what do we do? Do we waste our Father's gifts with prodigal, extravagant, wasteful living? Do we wish to be free from His rules and laws? Do we wish to do whatever we want? Do we

waste the abundant grace, mercy, and forgiveness our Father has given to us by recklessly living contrary to His Word? Do we take our Lord and His gifts for granted as though we deserve them? Do we think our place and status in God's family depends on us and our works? Do we see God as a loving Father or an overbearing tyrant?

You see, by God's grace in Christ, He says to you, "My son, you are always with Me, and everything I have is yours" (Luke 15:31). God the heavenly Father has done more than sacrifice the fattened calf for you: He has slain for you His very own Son, both to forgive you of all your sins and to secure for you your place in the Father's eternal home! He has done more than give you a young goat to celebrate with your friends: He has given you this meal of Holy Communion, the True Body and Blood of the Lord Jesus. There is no need to feel jealous of the beautiful ring and rich robe that your heavenly Father would place upon others who repent and return to Him, for by your Baptism you likewise have been given the same marks and gifts that identify you as sons of God. If others seem to squander the gifts that they have been given, do not worry! In the kingdom of God, there is more than enough grace, mercy, and peace to go around. You shall never be short-changed or forgotten because the riches of the Father's house are infinite. And they are yours. Your heavenly Father promises that He will be with you always. He will never leave you nor forsake you, even if you do so to Him. He never forgets His promises to you. Indeed, it is those very promises which draw you back to your Father again and again. Your Father's love, mercy, and grace shown you in the past is brought to your mind so that you turn from your sin and run to Him. And He receives you back from the dead through such repentance and faith that He has worked in you by the Holy Spirit. So rejoice when others too are brought to their senses and come to the Father for Jesus' sake.

Yes, when by His grace we realize our pitiful condition, and our inability to fix it, we can return home to a loving Father who welcomes us with open arms of boundless forgiveness. Note this well - we have a Father who welcomes us as sons no matter how far we've gone wrong or how badly we have wasted His inheritance. Yes, Jesus welcomes sinners and eats with them. God grant that each of us realizes that we are the sinner whom He welcomes and eats with, in Holy Communion now, and at the Messianic banquet for eternity. To Him be all the glory. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Rev. Timothy J. Landskroener