

Come Dinner Is Ready Your name is beside a plate.

Texts: Joshua 5:9-12

2 Corinthians 5:16-21 (Series C. 4th Sunday in Lent) Ps. 32

Luke 15:1-3, 11-32

“The older son was angry and would not go in to the feast.”

Let us prayer:

The parable of the prodigal son is one of the most loved of all the parables I believe this is so because it is so easy for us to see ourselves in it. We can *identify* with one or more of the *characters* in this divine drama. I must say.

Most people identify with the prodigal son, we see ourselves as people who have come to our senses, as people, got it together, as people who are at last on the right track.

A father with two sons. The case for the older brother is a difficult one because he looked so good. He kept his room straight and his nose clean. He played by the rules and paid all his dues. His résumé? Flawless. His credit? Squeaky clean. And loyalty unbeatable? While his brother was sowing wild oats, he stayed home and sowed the crops.

On the outside he was everything a father could want in a son. But on the inside, he was sour and shallow. Overcame by *jealousy*. Consumed by *anger*. Blinded by *bitterness*. The story of the prodigal son.

The boy who broke his father's heart by taken his inheritance and taking off. He trades his dignity for a whisky bottle, women, and his self-respect for a pigpen.

Things didn't work out as he thought, then comes, his *sorrow* and his *decision* to go home. He hopes his father will give him a job on the farm and a room over the garage.

What he finds is a father who has kept his absent son's place set at the table and the porch light on every night. The father is so excited to see his son back, so he throws a party, I mean a big party! But what the father did infuriated the older brother.

“The older son was angry” (v.28). It’s not hard to see why. “*So, is this how a guy gets recognition around here in this family eh? Get drunk, fool around, and go broke and you get a party?*” So, he sat outside the house and pouted.

“I have served you like a slave for many years and have always obeyed your commands. But you never gave me even a young goat to have at a feast with my friends.

But your *other* son, who wasted all your money on prostitutes, comes home, and you kill the fat calf for him!” (v.29-30). It appears that both sons spent time in the pigpen. One in the pen of *rebellion* the other in the pen of *self-pity*.

The younger one has come home. The older one hasn’t. He’s still in the wilderness. He is saying the same thing we said when the kid. It’s not fair when things did not go his way!

True story: *Mrs. Wanda Holloway* of Channelview, Texas, saw red. When her 14-year-old daughter didn’t get elected to the cheerleading squad, Wanda got angry. She decided to get even. So, she hired a hit man to kill the mother of her daughter’s chief competitor, hoping to so upset the girl that Wanda’s daughter would make the squad.

Fortunately, her plan failed and Wanda Holloway was caught. She was sentenced to fifteen years in prison. She didn’t have to be put behind bars to be imprisoned, however. *Bitterness* is its own prison. Dark and cold, bitterness denies easy escape.

Bitterness will do that to us. The sin of *Bitterness* will push us further than we would like to go, and will cost us more than we are willing to pay. It’ll cause you to burn down our house just to kill a rat.

Victims of betrayal. Victims of abuse. Victims of the system, the military, the world. *Angry. Hostile. Accusatory. Arrogant. Whiny.* Put them all together in one word and spell it *b-i-t-t-e-r*. If you put them all in one person, that person is in the pit—the dungeon of *bitterness*. The dungeon of *bitterness*, deep and dark, is beckoning us all to enter.

You know it, and I know it. We've all experienced enough hurt. You've been betrayed enough times. We all have history of rejections? Haven't you been left out, left behind. You are a candidate for the dungeon. We can choose, like many, to chain ourselves to our *hurt, pain, and disappointments*.

Or we can choose, like some, to put away our hurts before they become hates. We can choose to go to the party. You and I have a place there. Our name is beside a plate. If you are a child of God, no one can take away your son-ship / daughter-ship. Which is precisely what the father said to the older son. "*Son, you are always with me, and all that I have is yours*" (v.31).

And that is precisely what the Father says to *you* and *me* this very moment. How does God deal with our bitter heart? God reminds us that what we are is more important than what we don't have. We still have our relationship with God. No one can take that. NO one can touch it. Nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus.

The true emphasis is not on the sons, but on the father. It is unveiling the heart of God. The central truth of the parable is the picture of the heavenly Father's heart of love toward undeserving sinners.

Our health can be taken and our money stolen—but ***our place at God's table is permanent***. The older brother was bitter because he focused on what he didn't have and forgot what he did have. His father reminded *him*—and *us*—that he had everything he'd always had.

He had his *job*. He had his *place*. He had his *name*. He had his *inheritance*. The only thing he didn't have was the *attention*. And because he wasn't content to share it—he missed the party. It takes courage to set aside *jealousy* and *rejoice* with the achievements of a rival.

Sometimes the worst thing God can do is to give us what we want, the prodigal leaves for a "far, far away country", a place which exists first in our hearts. Before we can respond to God's mercy, we must gain a sense of our inability and how our rebellion has degraded our lives and offended God.

A mark of true repentance is the prodigal's desire to be subject again to authority. He became *lost* when he claimed his rights; he is *found* when he gave them up. The return to the father was a return to wisdom. The now-penitent son unconditionally confesses his offense, offering no excuses.

As with the Prodigal we are *new*, again and again, when we return to Christ and desist from sin ~ not in despair but in the joy of finding cleansing and wholeness, feeling *true of heart*. We have each taken the role of that son, and that elder brother in one form or another in our lives.

Yet God always welcomes us home and always celebrates our return, no matter how many times we wander off as if we can manage everything on our own. In the happiest times let us take care to remember that God in Christ is still walking with us. In the darkest times of life amid loss, regret, or hopelessness, God always knows us and forgives us.

Paul tells us that when we find our way to Christ, who is endowing us with *the ministry of reconciliation* from God, we become a new creation: *everything old has passed away*. Further, we are now *ambassadors for Christ*.

God is *never* the one who leaves. Even when we can't forgive ourselves, we are forgiven and redeemed by God. God in Christ will celebrate and rejoice when we who get lost, return to home.

Unlike the older brother, he was present at the party, but never went in. Blessed are we if we rise above our *hurts, bitterness, anger, and disappointments*. For if we do, we'll be present at our heavenly Father's final celebration. A party to end all parties. Celebration to end all celebrations. A party where you are known by *your name*.

Conclusion:

Here was the best of homes. The father has both *compassion* and *wealth*. He loves his sons and wants their happiness. Both sons are far from home--one *geographically*, both *spiritually*. To both He earnestly, softly, and tenderly calls: "*Come home, come home, you who are weary come home.*" Come home sisters, come home brothers and join the party.

A recap from last Sunday's sermon. In Isaiah 55 the Great invitation went out "*Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! ... Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy?*"

The Christian life is an invitation to commitment. In the darkest times of life amid *loss, regret, or hopelessness*, God *knows us, comforts us, and forgives us*. God is *never* the one who turns away. Even when we can't forgive ourselves, we are forgiven and redeemed by God ~ so, if God forgives me, who am I not to forgive myself? I just think about!

"The Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" And let the one who hears say, "Come!" Let the one who is thirsty come; and let the one who wishes take the free gift of the water of life." Rev. 22:17

I would like us to pray silently for just a few moments. If you're far from home, use this opportunity to talk with your Father in heaven; for *salvation*, for *healing*, for *restoration*. Turn over your *fears*, your *pride*, your *priorities*, your *sin*. He will lovingly welcome you home. Your name and mine is by the dinner plate.

Prayer:

Silent prayer, "Holy Father, we are not worthy to be called Your children, or even Your servants. Thank you for Your willingness to embrace us and make us your own, through the blood of Christ our Savior and Lord, *Amen*.

March 27, 2022

Prayer concerns: God of the Lost and of the Found, release us from earth-bound snares, bits and bridles, to be reconciled in Christ as a New Creation. Spare us from all that we think we deserve, to discover our selves, our hearts, and our souls freely at home again with You. We ask through Jesus, our Compassionate Savior; and the Holy Spirit, the Sanctifier of our Souls; who together with You, are One God, now and forever. **Amen.**

Make melodies in your heart with these hymns:

- **My Song Is Love Unknown # 343**
- **Softly and Tenderly Jesus is Calling # 608**
- **Salvation unto Us has Come #590**

HAPPY BIRTHDAY

Sam Zamani

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

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