

Lent 4-March 27, 2022

Baltic and East Nidaros Lutheran Parish

Luke 15:1-3, 11b-32

"A Man had Two Sons" Sermon by Pastor Randall J. Questad

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen

There was a man who had two sons. As many of you know or can relate to, siblings do not always act in the same way. Sometimes you wonder if one of them has been switched at birth because it doesn't seem possible based on how they behave that they could be from the same parents. Jesus told a parable about the striking different behaviors between two sons to relate to the behaviors of the sinful children who listened to him and obedient children who complained about him. Jesus really turns what we want to believe upside down when he says the obedient children were not the listeners. How would you respond if a teacher were to tell you at a parent-teacher conference that your child does exactly what they should in class, but then say, your child never listens and complains about everything? This is exactly how Jesus described the children of God who considered themselves to be obedient.

Jesus was the first teacher to implement the "No Child Left Behind" policy. The story of two sons is the third of three parables Jesus taught to show how he would not let even one of his children fall through the cracks. Jesus wasn't concerned about simply meeting high standards. Jesus would not rest until everyone that was lost would be found. Jesus not only looked for the lost. Jesus favored the lost. Jesus left 99 sheep to fend for themselves to find the one that was missing. Jesus left 9 coins to find the one that was lost. And in the parable of the Prodigal Son Jesus seems to turn his back on his obedient son and look for the return of the ONE son who was lost.

The younger son in the beginning of this parable was certainly bold and arrogant. He demanded his full share of inheritance. Asking for an inheritance from a parent means you are more concerned about the goods the parent must give more than the life of the parent. The younger son didn't just ask for an advance on a portion of what he felt he had coming. He wanted all the goods that were coming his way and he no longer cared about his home or his father. Without any question the father gave what the younger son demanded and without a goodbye or tear shed, the son left his home and never looked back. Not at first anyway. This is where this parable of the Prodigal son got its name. Prodigal means lavish or reckless. The younger son did everything that a parent doesn't want to hear their children are doing. Before long however, the prodigal son went from doing whatever he wanted to having to do what no one would want to do. He went from buying whatever he wanted to begging for what he needed just to survive. It isn't a coincidence that this parable of the prodigal son takes a turn while he was in the pig pen. Jesus was speaking to Jews who kept their distance from pigs, but here the son couldn't get any lower than not just living with pigs but eating what they do. You have to wonder if Jesus stared at the scribes and Pharisees and let those words of eating with the pig's ring in their ears after they had just told others that Jesus not only welcomes sinners but eats with them.

The younger son who had hit bottom didn't stay there. He remembered his Father who was reckless by giving an inheritance away without any question. Wouldn't a careful father want to know how the son planned on using his inheritance? And if the younger son was honest about his reckless intentions, wouldn't a father demonstrate a little "tough love" and withhold the inheritance until the son

was more responsible? The prodigal son remembered his prodigal father who was not careful, but carelessly and lavishly gave his son everything he had coming before demonstrating his worthiness.

When the younger son remembered his father, he turned toward home and began to rehearse his apology over and over in his mind before going and facing his father. The son not only wasted his inheritance, but he also wasted his time in preparing a long confession. As soon as his father saw him off in the distance, he ran out to meet him and embraced and kissed him. As his father was embracing his son, the son attempted to deliver his well-rehearsed apology. As soon as he told his father that he was no longer worthy to be his son, the prodigal nature of the father burst wider than before.

The father didn't ask the son how much of the inheritance he had left. He didn't demand an accounting of the places he spent the inheritance. The father didn't even say that they would sit down and work out a repayment plan to at least buy down the debt. The prodigal father instead opens his bank account again. He calls for his slaves to bring the best robe, the family ring and sandal for his feet. He orders them to kill the fatted calf and prepare a feast for the son who was lost. The son who thought he could live without the father had returned and the father organized a celebration for him.

That leaves the older obedient son who you could give a little credit for listening to something. Scripture says that he heard the music and the dancing that was going on back at home from the field where he was working. This listening quickly turned to complaining. He complained to the father that he had been obedient all his life. He complained about the calf that he had been feeding and had been hoping that it would be prepared for a party for him one day. He complained that his father had favored the prodigal son that he wouldn't even claim as his brother.

What does a father do for this older son who seemed to have rehearsed his complaint to his father? This father let him say all that he had to say and when he was done, he did the same for this son. He didn't reduce or take away the older son's inheritance. He reminded him that all that he had to give him was still his. He didn't exclude him from the party but invited him to join in the party to celebrate and rejoice.

We can probably associate ourselves with both of these two sons at different times of our lives. There are times when we might think that we are obediently listening to God, but God reminds us in those times, we may be really focusing on ourselves and not relying on God. There are times when we might complain to God who seems to favor sinners and we might express our complaint by saying, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them."

I know that I and maybe you can also relate to the younger son. We have received an underserved inheritance from our heavenly Father in our baptism. We have wandered off and forgotten where we came from. We believe that we will need to deliver a confession that will exceed our sinfulness. But this parable is more about the man and his desire to give than it is about the two sons who fear they can outspend the lavish love of the father. The man is Jesus who is not stingy or careful about where he delivers his forgiveness and mercy. This man is Jesus who loves and continues to seek to bring home all his lost children. Thanks be to God that this man, Jesus, not only welcomes sinners like you and I, but also eats with them. Amen