

Grace and peace are yours dear friends from God our Father and our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ;
Amen.

The parable of the prodigal son is a lesson in life for people of every age and culture; it is the epitome of forgiveness, love, and compassion. We know the story and even relate this very narrative to our own families, friends, and personal lives. We are after all, human.

Want and need are very real and [possibly] indistinguishable at times to us. The human truth is, we *want* a better life now and we continue to look for ways to improve our immediate lifestyle, relationships, or circumstance almost endlessly. For that matter, when we stop trying to improve, advance, or accent who we are, some might think we lost the will to live or that we have become complacent...or even worse: defeated. Even the Lutheran Church adopted a catch-phrase/slogan years ago that basically said if you are not growing (or improving), then you are dying. The human truth is we are busy with our wants and needs.

The parable today is offered to the crowds and Jesus does not define ‘who is who’ in the story, and He does not give any additional meaning or explanation. Specific people are mentioned who are present when this parable is shared; the Pharisees are among those who hear this. This in itself is an essential element of Holy Scripture because the son in the parable wants his inheritance now to use on himself. Jesus referred to the Pharisees as those who have already received their reward, so the message is also a prophecy for them to hear with the hope they will return to their Lord and God.

Jesus has been harsh with the Pharisees because they have neglected their position and abandoned their authority. They have elevated themselves instead of shepherding and ‘lifting up’ the people whom God placed in their care. He has called them a ‘brood of vipers’ and points out their abuses of the temple. Jesus is not happy with how the Pharisees have served God, and still, this parable promises the welcome they will receive if they repent. Jesus reveals in the parable, the celebration, the adornments, and the feast they will share; because, those dead have indeed found new life.

To view the basic elements of the parable are to see forgiveness, repentance, and obedience as the key principles in the father and the two sons. To some degree, these are the very items of spiritual growth and maturity. And for that matter, we may have all been prodigal to some point and degree in our lives. The word prodigal means: excessive, imprudent, lavish, reckless, thrifless, wasteful, and extravagant...you get the idea. The prodigal life is not what our Lord wants us to find and discover on our own, but rather a life that our Lord wants to freely give us all through repentance and faith.

You see my friends, it is God alone who wants to be the source of our happiness, our joy, our hope, peace, and life. It is God alone who desires that we be extravagant with our love, forgiveness, and all other gifts of the spirit instead sins of the world. And still, God is going to allow us to learn what the world will do and offer to us, if that is our choice.

We have the free will to choose for ourselves the path we want to follow. However, the story will end the same way for each of us, because; when we leave God ‘out of our lives’ and find our own happiness, we seek the Lord when the world has let us down, when the world has left us hungry, empty, and alone. When our resources come to and end, we seek the Lord who has no economy of love, compassion, care, and comfort; we seek our Lord who has the promise of abundant and eternal life.

The parable in today's text is so clear that we can relate to the Father and both sons. Furthermore, this strikes an emotional cord with us as the parable is [after all] entirely about family. Family is important and we all have one; none of us can be here without a father and mother. Family is the one relationship we hold dearer to us than any other; the one relationship (even when broken and dysfunctional) we continue to hope for; the one relationship we will pray for recovery, restoration, and reconciliation. We can relate to this parable completely because many of us have experienced one of the roles, if not all three.

Yes, We have all rebelled to some degree, we have all learned from our mistakes, and God has taught us all lessons. No family is perfect, but God's love and compassion will reveal the best in each of us and forever unite as one. All of this happens so we can share the gospel with credibility and witness to the life of Christ as people of faith, understanding, and experience. We grow and learn by the grace of God so we can tend and care for our eternal family, our brothers and sisters in Christ.

The gospel text is alive and speaking to us today, if we could only imagine what it would be like to have learned this lesson through hearing the text rather than experiencing it. The door is indeed open as is the Father's welcoming arms. We have heard the story, we share images of this text in our lives and families today, but what else can be in the text we may not have consider? What is the 'rest of the story' in the context of Lent.

Make no mistake, this parable is about repentance and it is all about begin welcomed back into family. We know that God is always going to welcome us back and our relationship with Him is indeed holy through our Lord Jesus Christ. My friends, there is another message that continues to be shared with the world today in this very parable; and it has to do with when humankind will welcome God back into their lives and family.

God has provided us with the faith and gift or our inheritance and promises never to leave us. However, like the prodigal son, it is up to us to welcome God back into our lives as well. We can ask for forgiveness, but we must also be willing to allow room for God in our lives.

Events and circumstances will present in our lives and will shake our faith. Some people may begin to question God, blame God, and see God very differently to where He is not welcomed in the same compassionate, caring, and loving way as when life is predictable and steady. When the storms arise in life, some will fail to welcome God because they do not feel worthy, adequate, or entitled to His help. Even worse, when some feel their prayers are not answered, some will give up on God.

God reminds that He is there, waiting and watching for all His children, and in addition to repentance, we must also be willing to turn around and head for home. My friends, this is where you and me are a critical element of the work of the Kingdom. We are the workers who help others see God's love for them so they will be able to turn back and head for home. It us all of us as brothers and sister; children of the same heavenly Father who will rejoice when even one turns around and is given new life.

It is about our family and the love, patience, commitment, and care we share for one another both today and throughout eternity. We have the promise that this relationship will last and what appears to be broken will indeed be restored. And we celebrate life with the hope and joy that our entire family will find great comfort, joy, and rest in the peace that passes all understanding to keep our hearts and minds through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.