

Theme: Home Is Where the Heart Is!  
Luke 15:1-3, 11-32

“Grace and peace to you from God our Father, the Lord Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit who has brought us together”. Amen

The Word of God through which the Holy Spirit guides our hearts and minds today is recorded in the Gospel of Luke 15:1-3, 11-32, which I read before. Let us pray: “Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, Oh Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer.” Amen

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At the beginning of chapter 15<sup>th</sup> of the Gospel of St. Luke Jesus speaks to tax collectors and sinners, and He tells them three parables. First He speaks about the lost sheep: [Luke 15:4] "What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open country, and go after the one that is lost, until he finds it?" Then He speaks about the lost coin: [Luke 15:8] "Or what woman, having ten silver coins, if she loses one coin, does not light a lamp and sweep the house and seek diligently until she finds it?"

Finally, Jesus speaks about two brothers and their father, which is our text for meditation for this morning. He says: "There was a man who had two sons. And the younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of property that is coming to me.' And he divided his property between them."

Jesus told this triple parable in response to the arrogance of the Pharisees and the scribes. The Pharisees and the scribes just do not seem to get the point. When they say, "This man receives sinners and eats with them," they are saying that Jesus is doing what He is supposed to be doing. They keep saying this as though Jesus should be ashamed of it. But rescuing sinners is the whole point of the ministry of Jesus. He Himself said, [Luke 5:31-32] "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance."

Among all the parables of Jesus, the parable of the Prodigal Son and the parable of the Good Samaritan are the most popular and best known. Both of them capture our special interest because they wonderfully picture the love of God for us and through us.

The parable of the Prodigal son, who finally returns home to a waiting father, includes more than the account of an irresponsible and ungrateful son. His elder brother comes at the end of the story and, he too, helps to illustrate the love of God. We learn that love is there for the despicable as well as the dependable.

In our parable looks like the brothers did not like each other. They do not behave in the same way as their father. They are selfish and insensitive to each other; they are a little bit mean toward their father. The younger son cannot wait to get away; the other cannot wait to see him go. The one demands his share of the inheritance, the other is willing to wait around as his share grows in value and then becomes his own.

The younger brother believes that “home is where the action is.” For him the family setting was too bored and filled with the same routine. He had fixed his eyes outside his home. He wanted his home to be out there in the world of action and excitement. He felt life had to be more than this narrow circle of family and a few friends.

So he asks his father: “Father, give me the share of property that is coming to me.” He was basically saying, “Dad, I wish you were dead so that I could have your stuff.” The normal response of a father would be to explode in rage, throw the son out of the house, and disown him. The father should declare that his son is dead to him. He is to be treated as a stranger. But not, his father shows his patience and love for him. The father instead of ordering his son to stay at home; he respects his desire for identity and independence and even adventure. The boy will have the opportunity of learning firsthand, perhaps even the hard way, that life is more than “action.”

It did not take him long to get on his way! Jesus says that in a few days “the younger son gathered all he had and took a journey into a far country, and there he squandered his property in reckless living.” Even if he had had high-minded goals, his life became a round of mere games. Soon reduced to desperation and working at swilling swine to survive, he began to come to his senses. He was learning that “home is not where the action is.”

While all this happens the elder brother stayed ‘behind, believing that “home is where the hearth is,” a haven, a security, a safe place which would eventually be his very own. He seemed at first glance to be the better of the two boys: settled, dependable, devoted to duty, a very active man in the family business.

But seeing him in action upon receiving the news of the return of his long-lost brother spoil the positive picture we might have had of him. He disliked his wayward brother so much that he bitterly resents his return; he complains to his father of being short-changed for all his faithfulness, unhappy that the old man wants to celebrate the return of the prodigal. He cannot bring himself to call him “brother,” preferring to call him, “this son of yours.”

But underneath it all is a resentment of the love of his father for an unworthy son. Like the parable of ‘the laborers in the vineyard’, he “envies the generosity of his father.” My friends; love was alright when it is given to the respectable, the faithful, the deserving (like himself). As for his brother, “He made his bed; let him lye in it.” He resisted sharing ‘the love he had known with anyone so undeserving.

The situation of these brothers is not new. It is an old story that has happened in many of our families and in all of our hearts. We all know the resentments we feel over failures we blame on others. We know the disgust with others who we believe have failed us and even disgraced us.

There may be actual situations in our own experience which are part of this old story of separation between brothers and sisters, parents and children, husbands and wives; people who once were old friends or co-workers but are now separated from one another.

And beyond these specifics there are our attitudes toward people of different races or classes or groups with whom we wish to have nothing to do. Usually in these situations we excuse ourselves and blame others. We are in the right and they are wrong. We do not want it this way but there is nothing we can do about it. Or, maybe in our spite and stubbornness, we do want it this way and nobody is going to change us.

The brothers in our story were acting in a very bad manner. The Father behaves in a lovely manner. The waiting father demonstrates that, indeed, “home is where the heart is.” Each boy needs his love and he handles each boy gently and patiently, offering that which neither deserves nor could claim. He refused to invoke parental authority to settle the score, rebuking the disobedient for his extravagance or the whining one for his jealousy and anger. Instead, each son is met with a wonderful response properly at the moment.

The prodigal son, returning with a heavy heart and a guilty conscience and a wounded pride, is swept off his feet by the love of his a father, which had patiently waited for his return. Jesus tells us that the father ran to meet him; spotting him at a distance, he could not wait any longer to embrace his long-lost son.

Though the boy had hit the bottom, the father lifted him up. Though the boy had acted in a stupid manner, in a selfishly way spending his inheritance, the father welcomed him back home. Though the boy had disowned his family, the father restored his membership. The boy learned again that which he had earlier despised and partly forgotten: “Home is where the heart is,” a heart beating with love for him.

For those of us who dislike the prodigal son—come to our senses and want to come back home, we are assured of a Father’s welcome and the forgiveness and the grace we need for restoration of our membership in his family. In fact, that is part of what the church is all about: to share the forgiving and reconciling love of God with one another and with anyone who return “from the far countries of action and waste.”

The other boy saw more duty than delight in servicing the home fires. He had stuck it out and now did not want any competition for the attention or the affection of his father. Yet as he express his anger and displeasure of the fuss being made over the return of his younger brother, he, too, met the meaning of “heart” in the home.

His father did not rebuke or ignore him in the ecstasy of reunion; he rather reminded him of the added blessings they had been privileged to share in their joint ownership of “all that is mine,” alleviating any fear of being short-changed in the future. And then he points out his reason for celebrating: “this, your brother, was dead and is alive; he was lost, and is found.” The father was saying: It is not what my son had done, but that he had returned, which compels them all to make merry and to be glad.

For those of us who, like the elder brother, have tried to stay and do our duty here within the family of God, the story urges us to be grateful for the love we have known and shared for many years. But it also reminds us “to rejoice over each sinner who repents.”

Our acceptance of the returning is a mark of our understanding and appreciation of

the love of the Father which we have experienced and the inheritance he has promised to all who love him.

These are basic qualities of God's love for us all. Jesus himself becomes the bridge over which we, prodigals sons and daughters, return home. Through him we know that "home is where the heart is." And for those of us who, like the elder brother, await the arrival of returning sisters and brothers, it is again Jesus and His love which enables us to forgive, to receive and to welcome, to join in celebration at every "family-reunion" which takes place here in church or wherever his people gather. Amen

May grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus Christ our Lord, and Savior. Amen.