

“Don’t Forget... Whose You Are”

Sermon. July 14, 2019. Epler’s UCC, Leesport, PA

Ephesians 2:13-15 & Luke 15:11-32

This morning is our first Sunday of the Sermon Series entitled “Don’t Forget.” Over the next four weeks we will be spending some time looking at ways that in our faith, we may “forget” what it means to love ourselves or to be reminded today that we are God’s.

Don’t Forget... Whose You are. This might sound simple for some of us to be reminded that we are faithful people that we know that God cares for us and watches over us and loves us. However, it can also be challenging for some who seem to lose sight of the bigger picture when we go astray and don’t realize when God is calling us back or those who may feel as if they are not welcomed by God because of who they are, what they look like, or who they love.

This morning we are going to be looking at a very familiar parable of the Prodigal Son. A text that allows us to know that we can go home. A text that shows us that we can share in the love of our family. A text that helps us to understand that we are God's people...and we can go home.

One of the resources that I use fairly regularly when studying for sermons is an old commentary written by a theologian named William Barclay. Although I don't always agree with his interpretation, I really appreciate his title for this section of scripture. The title is not the parable of the Prodigal Son, but the Story of a Loving Father.

Many times when we hear this scripture, we take the time to focus on the son. The one that is returning. The one that recognized the error of his ways. OR...we focus on the other son. The jealous son who was always working for his father and never left the family business.

But today, we are going to focus on the Father. The loving one who sees that no matter how far his son strays. No matter how much the father may be angry for his younger son spending all of his inheritance frivolously, he still loves him, unconditionally.

Let's take a quick look at this story. Historically in Jewish culture, it was customary for the elder son to receive two-thirds of the inheritance and the younger son one-third. It was laid out in law and it was followed very closely. A father could not really decide for himself what he was to do with his money and estate. It was all chosen for him.

In our parable, the younger son comes to ask his father for his portion (which would be one-third) of his father's estate and goes away. The father in this story allows his son to go and learn this hard, life lesson by himself.

Sometimes we challenge God and do things the way that WE think they should be going. Sometimes we don't follow in the right path and we stray. It happens. We make mistakes. We lose sight of the larger picture, but we know, that we are always welcomed back.

This younger Son, after spending all of his money knew that he had to return home. But he didn't do it asking for more money. He didn't do it to get a party or to be showered with welcome. He did it humbly, recognizing his actions and his mistakes, coming home to a father who DID show him love and not judgment.

This passage should never be called the parable of the son because the son is not the hero. The father's love is more important than the son's sin. Our father's love for us is more important than the mistakes that we make. The welcome that is

received by the son in this parable is the welcome that we receive when we return to God.

This passage also makes me think about the people who do not want to return to God...or at least the church. So many people are hurt by the church in various ways. Everything from simple arguments at a consistory or congregational meeting to a deeply discussed theological topic or even the acceptance of a person of a different color, culture, or sexual orientation can make a person feel that the church is not there for them.

There is also a bigger problem for some people when they don't feel welcome because of who they are. In the history of the church, the "church" has historically not been so nice to people of color or the LGBT community or the immigrant.

But on the other hand, Jesus was a person who welcomed all. He sat down with people who no one else would. Jesus was

an immigrant himself, traveling from place to place, preaching a message that not everyone wanted to hear.

There are still people who do not feel welcome in a church just because of who they love or what they stand for. The church is the first place that everyone should feel welcome no matter what a person stands for...as long as that stance is one that is debated and worked through the love that Jesus has set before us.

In our parable, there is a younger son. He returned to his father after making some mistakes. But in this story, we don't read that his dad didn't ask him questions about what he did. The father didn't scold him for spending money improperly or doing the wrong thing. This man, this father of love, knew who his son was...a person...a person who came back home, humbly, looking for just some forgiveness. The father...did just that. He welcomed home the son.

God is like this too. God doesn't question where we have been. God lets us go our own way and allows us to return on our own because God doesn't want us to forget whose we are. We are God's even if we make mistakes. We are God's even if we "fit into a category" that historically the church has chased away. We are God's...because God has created us to be who we are. We are God's...because if we are an LGBT person or an immigrant person or a person that believes that we should have more gun control or less control or if we don't agree in this room on what God looks like if we all drew a picture of him or her...we cannot forget...Whose we are. I am here to help remind you...You are a beloved child of God. Amen.