**3/27/22**

**Love for the Lost**

**Luke 15:1-3, 11b-32**

God has a sense of humor, doesn’t he? I rarely have the opportunity to preach, and go figure one of those times I did it would end up having to be on the parable of The Prodigal Son! I never really cared for this parable for so many reasons growing up. And I must admit, I am still struggling with embracing it, or even sharing about it this morning. Although, that is the awesome part about our faith isn’t it? We get stretched in ways we don’t even expect or want to be, and we are blessed to be together and be fragile or strong with one another in an effort to grow and learn.

So, you may be wondering what it is I am really struggling with. Well, I admit I had the same feelings of animosity, bitterness, resentment, and anger that the second son had. Now, you may ask how this might be, because some of you know that I am an only child. Well, when you compete in Youth Groups, Christian Boy Scouts, Sports, and so many other things growing up you manage to have brothers and sisters that get the credit, rewards, accolades, or even the forgiveness and second chances that you feel they did not deserve. Admittedly, I did not need the rewards and accolades, or all the forgiveness or second chances others may have received. However, I still managed to win some awards, and receive some forgiveness, but not to the level like this first son or others did when I was growing up. I never realized that I needed to learn that, you can’t always control your position, but you can control your disposition. You can control your attitude. I did not know where these people were at in their life, other than that which was at surface level. So, I should have learned that I needed to take a step back and let things go, or eat a piece of that proverbial humble pie. And, realize that thankfully I have never been as lowly to have lost everything, and have never had to resort to debating or actually eating out of a pig trough.

Now, if you manage to remember our Gospel Reading from last week we were called to Repent, or turn toward God; and we talked about that fig tree, and another chance to grow through grace. This week’s Gospel Reading has similar story lines. The first son repents, and turns towards his father for forgiveness. The first son is afforded an additional chance to grow and be forgiven through the grace offered to him through the gardener or farmer, which is his father. He received a welcoming he did not expect, and he received the unconditional love from his father that meant the world to him.

Now we come to the second son, the disgruntled one, or quite simply me growing up. Awkwardly enough, this second son is also provided an opportunity to repent and grow too. Some of you might ask, what exactly did he do wrong? Well, I think it is pretty plain and simple. He exhibited that same animosity, bitterness, resentment, and anger I talked about having earlier. Now, this was focused towards his brother, and if you really think about it, it was even focused towards his father too. These are not exactly Christian values are they? Yes, he did right and stuck by his father and continued to care for the land, and did not squander his share of the property. However, it was like he forgot that his brother was even lost, or could have very well have been dead. And for sure, forgiveness and rejoicing were far from his mind when his brother just showed up without anything left. It was like he expected his father just to turn his brother away or something. The second son expected to get the robe, the sandals, and the ring. He expected to have had the opportunity at the very least to get a young goat to celebrate and share with his friends for always doing the right thing. The second son lacked the insight into the fact that doing the right thing meant that everything was now his. He had the reward of the entire farm. He had the reward of having his father. Now, he even had the reward of having his brother back too. He needs to repent for his feelings and actions. He needs to grow through the grace of his father, and even his brother.

Let us remember God and the love he has shown all of us through Jesus. He knows our sin and suffering for he has endured them as well. He has forgiven us and desires to embrace us again into his family. Let us remember him and there will be rejoicing in heaven and on earth over every sinner that turns from going their own way and back to God.

Now, let’s explore something more subtle, but just as vitally important to this Gospel Reading today. At the beginning of the Gospel Reading I know there was something that we all may have missed. This very well may be because we were trying to get the big picture, or we just may have recognized or recalled the all too familiar parable of the Prodigal Son. Let me refresh your memories by rereading it, “Now all the tax collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to [Jesus.] And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, “This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them.””

It's interesting how, in the Gospels, Jesus spends so much time eating, drinking, talking, teaching, walking, fishing, and hanging out with folks who the Pharisees and legal experts call: "sinners." We might ask ourselves, "What is a Pharisee?" Pharisees were the leading Jewish religious sect of Jesus' time.

They believed in following the letter of the Law. The word "Pharisee" itself comes from the Hebrew verb for "separate."

And so the Pharisees sought to separate themselves from the social outcasts. And in their minds, Jesus must do the same if He is going to "get" to hang out with them. But Jesus is the friend of whoever will have Him. It just so happens this turns out to be the social outcasts, the marginalized, the lost, the lonely. These are the folks who become Jesus' disciples. These are the folks who flock to Jesus. These are the "tax collectors and sinners" that Jesus welcomes and eats with. These are the people that the Pharisees are grumbling about.

What if, we, good church-going folks of today were to see Jesus hosting a dinner party where He invites drug dealers, pimps, pornographers, muggers, thieves, sex traffickers, gang leaders, terrorists, unfaithful spouses, cheating tax payers, child abusers, computer hackers, con artists, crooked politicians, white supremacists and greedy, reckless Wall Street Bankers? Would we mumble and grumble? Is this a guy we would want to hang out with as well?

The word used for "welcomes" literally means "hosts." In other words, Jesus is the host of sinners. Which means Jesus chooses these folks to be His friends. Jesus seeks them out. Jesus invites them to be with Him. Jesus chooses to hang out with the misfits, the cast-aways. In Luke 19:10 Jesus declares: "The Son of Man came to seek and save the lost."

Now to be sure, the Pharisees and other religious leaders were invited to Jesus' parties as well. The only problem was that they wouldn't stay or even go in if these other "low life's" were there. They kept themselves out. What would we do?

 Let me remind you, and myself, of some of these simple concepts. The church is not a waiting room for the saints but a hospital room for the sick. Sunday morning church is not the destination spot for the church but the launching pad of inspiration for what we can be and don Monday through Saturday. Embracing misfits is often risky. All good things are. Sure, people will walk all over you. But if you want to be a bridge of hope, you have to be willing to be stepped on. The church is not a social club of fake perfection. It’s a place where broken people fall in love with a perfect God. People who have learned the power of restoration have learned to love people where they are, not where they’re supposed to be.

Then we, like Christ, can be accused by the Pharisee, of dining with derelicts; fellow derelicts, likewise in need of grace; mercy; love. The greatest way to experience the love of God is to become a conduit of it. What is the job of the Christian? It is supremely to look like Christ. Let us continue to be a people who welcome fellow sinners to the table of grace; to the glory of God!

AMEN

**References from SermonCentral.com:**

Dining With Derelicts

Contributed by Chris Surber on Mar 9, 2010

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Denomination: Christian Church

The God Who Runs

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Scripture: Luke 15:1-32

Denomination: Lutheran

Seeking Sinners

Contributed by Dennis Davidson on Oct 6, 2014

Scripture: Luke 15:1-10

Denomination: Baptist

"Look Who Jesus Hangs Out With"

Contributed by Kenneth Sauer on Jul 31, 2015

Scripture: Luke 15:1-10

Denomination: United Methodist

**References from a book I have read:**

Misfits Welcome: Find Yourself in Jesus and Bring the World Along for the Ride

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