

PASTOR GWEN'S MESSAGE
5TH WEDNESDAY IN LENT
"FORGIVENESS — GIVEN AND RECEIVED"
WEDNESDAY APRIL 6, 2022

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

There is probably no greater or more important parable than the one you just heard read from the Gospel of Luke. At first glance, it appears to be a simple story of two brothers and a father. In reality it is a story about two things: forgiveness and accepting forgiveness.

The father in the story who the parable should really be named after, is prodigal. Each of his two sons rejects him in different ways at different time.

The younger son asked for his inheritance from his father before his dad is even on his death bed. It was usual, as it is today to not inherit money or property before the dad has gone to his heavenly home. In Jesus' day this was unheard of. The son by Jewish law is to be given one 1/3 of his father's estate. There are two sons and the older one is intitled to two shares of inheritance. And so, the young son wants is 1/3 share now.

We don't actually know what the young son does with his money. His older brother surmises that he gambles and carouses with it, squandering it on bad intentions. This may or may not be true. He could have used it to try to start a business or to help someone. We don't know. What we do know is that the money is gone. Young son is left with a job of feeding the swine.

Remember Jewish custom here and then let us add in some logical thinking. We realize that this is a terrible job for the younger son. Jews find pigs dirty animals and do not even eat their meat, nor do they use them as sacrifices. They are deemed unclean. Another thought for us is that the father is probably the talk of the town giving away 1/3 of his wealth to a capricious son who wants to live it up now. This would have been a very disgraceful act. The young son has disrespected his father

by asking for such a thing. People, including the eldest son do not understand why the father would do this thing and go against custom.

These things are concerns that those listening to this parable would certainly understand. After all Jesus was talking to not only tax collectors and sinners, but the pharisees and scribes as well. And the Pharisees were men that were notable for their strict religious observances. And so, they are already grumbling since Jesus includes the tax collectors and sinners in the group to which he is speaking. The Pharisees did not like “those” people” and so I can imagine that they were really irate after hearing this parable that told a father how not to raise a Jewish family, a Jewish son. Pigs and giving away inheritance in a way other than prescribed by Jewish law were obvious things for the Pharisees to grumble about.

Our story continues as the young son is broke and has no other option than to go home to his father in hope of getting a job as one of his father’s hired hands. That would be better life than his lowly existence as a pig tender. So, he plots out what he is going to say to his father along the way home. He was able to manipulate his father once, so it should be easy to do it again. But all the words he planned are not necessary as his father is delighted to see him coming home.

His father is so delighted to see him, as he has been hoping against all odds that this younger son would return. He has fatherly compassion for this lost son who has returned home and wants to celebrate. To him, it only matters that his younger son is finally home. The father does not question why or how. He is just happy his son is back home where he belongs. And so, it is party time. Clean up the son and let’s have a party. Even the fatted calf will be invited to feed the guests. Realize that beef was not a staple in their usually diets, but a treat. This was a grand event to celebrate. No holds barred. Invite everyone for a meal and celebration with dancing and drinking. Certainly, it is an occasion worthy of extravagance.

What we learn from this part of the parable is that forgiveness has no borders? Even if our behavior is scandalous and our repentance less than perfect, there still is a mighty welcome by our Lord and Savior Jesus. Our sin is never greater than divine love and forgiveness. God’s love covers a multitude of sins and as on the cross, Jesus’ arms are wide open to grant forgiveness to all.

And now on to the older son, who comes from a different place. He is hard working, responsible, uptight, bitter, and quite spiteful. He has stayed with his father and worked longer and harder than anyone else. As he comes from the field oblivious to what has happened, he sees what is going on in preparation to celebrate his

brother's homecoming. The party of the century is underway, and he is livid to say the least.

The father tells the older son what has happened, and the older son is downright mad. He talks back to his father that he has slaved all these years and he never got a party not even a little party. The father tries to explain but it falls on deaf ears. And the older son refuses to join in the celebration for his lost brother who is now found.

This oldest son refuses the father's explanation. Even though he has served his father all these years, his attitude of disdain on his father, is real at this point. He does not understand the forgiveness his father has for the actions of his brother, while he longs to be recognized himself.

God forgives us unconditionally and expects us to do the same. Even our haughtiness and pride cannot outreach God's mercy. Our loving father is here every day to reach out to us even if we are having a difficult time forgiving others or ourselves. The Holy Spirit is always willing to walk us right into a celebration of forgiveness, if you will.

This parable of the prodigal son and prodigal father invite us to accept forgiveness as well as extend forgiveness. It does not make us any less likely to sin, but it rather offers an example of what it means to forgive and how to accept this most gracious gift. We are after all human and need a reminder from time to time. And what better time than during Lent, a most introspective time.

If we look closely, I think we can all find ourselves in both the younger and the older son. Some of us may also find ourselves in the role of the father. Wherever our minds go within this story, know that God is always with us to forgive our actions and thoughts. God showers us with His forgiveness through His Son Jesus Christ, as he died on the cross and rose again to save us from our sins.

God's mercy bears fruit when we repent and accept His forgiveness ourselves. God's mercy bears fruit when we offer forgiveness to others. Truly only then, we can live into the abundant life God wants for us. Then eventually we will join an ultimate celebration that lives into eternity. **AMEN**