

Radical Love at Home  
Luke 15:11-32

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February 11, 2007

When our Lord wanted to drive home a truth, he told a story and the greatest story ever told is the story in the Bible of the Prodigal Son. Every preacher has tried to preach it; songs have been written about it; movies have been made of it. There are Prodigal Ministries and Prodigal Magazines, but let not our familiarity with the story blind us to its meaning for our lives. For whoever you are, wherever you came from, however you perceive your future, you are in this story, in every word on every line. “A certain man had two sons.”

**ONE SON IS A PRODIGAL.** He wants it all; he thinks life is to be found in far away places. His favorite words are me, my, and I, so he says to his father, “Give me the share of property that will belong to me; don’t put me in your will; write me a check.” We would consider such a request rude, crude and a greedy request from a self-centered son. We don’t really get it. In Middle Eastern culture, the son was saying, “Drop dead, Dad.” “Get out of the way.” “You’re blocking me from life.”

To nobody’s surprise, the guy squanders his wealth in wild living. We usually think he was a kid right out of high school, out to sow his wild oats. Maybe he was middle-aged and on a mission to regain his lost youth. Even worse, he could have been some old fool who has lived long enough to know better. Whatever his age, he reckons with a truth: money won’t buy us love; travel won’t bring us happiness; getting what we want doesn’t mean having what we need. Too many selfish dreams leave us stranded in some pig pen.

What draws us to the prodigal son? Are we drawn to his wild spirit? Is there not a rebellious nature in us all? Is that why he’s attractive? We, too, have felt the urge to take the cash and let the credit go. Or do we admire him because he comes to his senses, makes the long trip home, and winds up in the arms of his loving father?

There is not a person here that does not long to be loved like that, forgiven like that, restored like that. We, like the prodigal, want to hear, “Welcome home, my child; come on in.” If we failed to hear it from our earthly father, then we need even more to hear it from our Heavenly Father.

“A certain man had two sons.” This man is some kind of dad. He is gracious, compassionate, and forgiving.

He is **GRACIOUS**. He divided his property between them. Sometimes I wonder what I might have said if one of my two sons had made such a request of me. Only some of my responses can be repeated in public: “Dream on.” “Get a life.” “Who do you

think you are?” But this father is different; he knows love is not control. He knows many waters cannot quench love; neither can rivers wash it away. To dam up love is to make it stagnant, so he lets him go.

He is **COMPASSIONATE**. He loves even though it hurts. You who are parents know how hard it is to say good-bye when the parting is a time of joy. Think of how it must feel when the parting is like a death or may even be a death. This father doesn't love one son more than the other. He loves them both the same. When the elder brother refuses to let his face be greasy with the rejoicing, the father goes out to him, listens patiently to his story and then says, “You are always with me. All that I have is yours.” That is love and compassion. He loves them both.

He is **FORGIVING**. In Verse 20 of our scripture lesson we read, “...*but while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him.*” He tells his slaves to bring out the best robe, put it on his back. Get the signet ring and put it on his finger. Put some shoes on his feet; all God's children got shoes. Kill the fatted calf and let us eat and celebrate, for this my son was dead, but now is alive; he was lost, but now is found.

Here's the question. Have you any interest in being a parent like that? Have you the desire to give and forgive and welcome others home with the open arms of compassion? The world has an abundance of prodigal sons and stubborn brothers, but what about the radical love of this extravagant father? Can there ever be enough of that? Which brings me to a question:

**WHERE IS THE MOTHER?** Everybody has a mother of some kind or another. I posed this question with ministers, musicians, bishops and marriage counselors as I prepared the sermon this week. The responses were humorous to say the least. Maybe they were Methodist and she was in the kitchen preparing the fatted calf. Maybe they were Baptists and she was graciously submitting along with the other slaves. Maybe she was a liberated Episcopalian out pursuing a career of her own. More likely, she was a good Jew, doing all the work and getting little credit for it.

Back in the 1600's, renowned artist Rembrandt did a painting of The Prodigal Son. It still hangs today in St. Petersburg, Russia. Rembrandt handles the question of the missing mother in a subtle way. She is portrayed in the hands of the father who has both of his hands on the back of his son who is on his knees barefooted. The left hand is strong, muscular, big and firm. The right hand does not fit the man who is standing behind it. It is refined, soft, tender, and elegant. According to Rembrandt, God is both mother and father. He holds us; she caresses us. As it is extremely unlikely that a mother would abandon her children, God does not abandon us. Have you met God as your mother? Have you felt the gentle touch of God?

Of course, this story is not complete without the elder brother. While the party is progressing, he is whining, grumbling, griping, and too angry to go in. “Who's stuck with all the work around here? Who's had to stand by and watch our parents age with

sorrow? I've never had time for a party. My friends and I have never taken time to rejoice."

Whether or not we want to admit it, there is a lot of the elder brother in all of us. The parable is first spoken to scribes and Pharisees who were complaining that Jesus was spending too much time with tax collectors and sinners.

Grace never seems fair. It doesn't seem fair in families, in church, and certainly not in society. You go about loving people who don't deserve to be loved and a lot of people are going to hate you.

Isn't that why families fall out and fight? Who is completely free of jealousy and greed? If you try for a lifetime to earn the blessing of your family and a sibling gets it without even trying, you will most likely have some feelings about that.

"A certain man had two sons" and how does this story end? Does the kid get restless again and run away a second time or does the older brother repent and come to the party? It doesn't tell us, does it? Do you know why? Because we decide and write the rest of the story. Will we stay in the far country too proud to admit our own mistakes? Will resentment keep us from the party? You and I decide.

So what are you going to do with this story? Will you sweep it off as one you've heard a thousand times or do something with it? If you are tired of running or sick of resentment or whatever, isn't it about time you came home? Maybe your family is scattered and you need to pray about it because only God can hear your brokenness. Isn't it time you asked the Lord for some help? If you want to love like these parents loved, you are going to need God to help you do that. Have you ever asked Him for that kind of grace—to love like that, extravagantly, personally, and powerfully?

Amen.