

Sept 4<sup>th</sup> 2011: Father's Day: A Parable of The Father's Love. Luke 15:11-32

The parable read to us today is normally referred to as The Parable of the Prodigal Son, yet in reality it tells us more about the Father than it does about either of the two sons and it is from that perspective that I want to look at it both today and next Sunday. In many ways we can see it as a corrective parable in that it reveals how two sons both had a false view of their Fathers love for them that had to be corrected.

And behind the telling of this parable we can see Jesus attempting to do exactly the same thing for His listeners. Aiming to correct the warped view of God that had been presented to them by the religious leaders of their day. For the God preached by the Pharisees and the Scribes and the Priests was much, much more of a judge than a loving Father.

There was a whole section of Society that had been told, and had therefore come to believe that they had no chance of ever gaining God's favour. They were labeled as sinners, tax collectors, prostitutes, lepers, Samaritans, Gentiles. Regarded as people with whom God was permanently displeased because of what they had done; the family they had just happened to be born into; the sickness that was destroying them, or the mistakes they had made.

A large group of loss souls who flocked to hear Jesus because He cared about them and encouraged them to dare to believe that God was still their Father, and that as father He still loved them.

To such Jesus told this parable, and as they heard the story of a son who had mucked up his life. Who had foolishly squandered both wealth and opportunity; made mistake upon mistake; bad decision after bad decision. Many of them would have shared his pain as they too looked at their own past lives and saw similarities with his—looked at their own future, shut out from family and also from God the Father's care and love forever.

So when Jesus reached that part of the story when He told about the young man's decision to return home and beg for mercy, this group of people would have been all ears as they strained to hear the rest of the story.

They would have understood the sons emotional struggle that led him to that place where he said (15:17-19) **'How many of my father's hired men have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! <sup>18</sup> I will set**

***out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. <sup>19</sup> I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired men.'***

Within these words we can see the expectations he had regarding his father's response to him, and they are not high. At best he hoped that his father would accept his repentance as genuine and agree to employ him as a hired hand—giving him a chance to prove that he was a changed man indeed.

And we can imagine some in the crowd turning to their mates at this point and asking, what do you reckon will happen when he gets to the father? "Oh the father won't even talk to him. He would have disowned him by now. The guys got no chance." And perhaps the other may have responded, "I'm not so sure. The young guy has obviously changed a lot. And he showed great courage in returning home. I reckon the old man might find him work somewhere, after letting him sweat a bit first. Of course there's no way his father would ever treat him as his son again."

I'm sure that crowd would have shared that son's viewpoint of his father, and what Jesus said next would have blown them out of the water! ***"But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.***

***<sup>21</sup> "The son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.'***

***<sup>22</sup> "But the father said to his servants, 'Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. <sup>23</sup> Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. <sup>24</sup> For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' So they began to celebrate.***

Imagine the reaction of those guys in the crowd to Jesus' words. "No way. That would never happen. Why the father treats the son as though he was just returning from a holiday or from an extremely successful business trip, and not as a ratbag of a kid who has just blown a fair chunk of the family fortune that the father had worked hard for over many years.

He is responding to this scum of a son as though the son had nothing to answer for. He is just so glad to see him that he runs to greet him as though the son had never put a foot out of place. And without even a cross word he gives the son back the robe and ring of authority, sandals, and throws a party to celebrate his return. That just would not have happened. No earthly father would have acted that way. Pleased to see him maybe, but to act like that.....no, that goes beyond belief."

And I can see in my mind's eye Jesus, leaning towards the crowd and addressing them with a smile on His face. "No earthly father, maybe, but that's the way your heavenly Father delights to act when one of His children turns back to Him seeking another chance.

Whatever you may have heard before or feel now about God, this is how He acts towards you as Father, because He loves you."

What a wonderful picture of God as Father that Jesus gives us through this parable, and it is one that we can trust, for it is given by God the Son.

I really like the poster that we have outside the church this month. It shows a cartoon drawing of a little man walking along while reaching out in order to touch the very tip of the finger of this giant hand, which clearly represents the hand of God. And the caption reads, "Don't walk alone".

That's a picture of my relationship with God as my heavenly Father. It's the reality of my personal experience with Him every day and it fills me with Joy. Is it yours? Because if it isn't it can be because of Jesus, for the Father just waits to put His arms around you and to make all things new, if only you will come to Him.

And if that picture is as true for you today as it is for me, then just give God so much of your love and thanksgiving on this Father's Day, for He deserves it more than any other. Let's adore Him together as Father. Let's get excited all over again as we Praise Him anew for what He means to us. Let's open up our hearts to Him with all our sorrows and joys; hurts and hopes for He is our Father like no other. And in His care we are safe forever.