

The Heart of God

Luke 15:11-32 (NASB)

The Parable of the Lost Son

¹¹ And He said, "A man had two sons. ¹² The younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of the estate that is coming to me.' And so he divided his wealth between them. ¹³ And not many days later, the younger son gathered everything together and went on a journey to a distant country, and there he squandered his estate in wild living. ¹⁴ Now when he had spent everything, a severe famine occurred in that country, and he began doing without. ¹⁵ So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, and he sent him into his fields to feed pigs. ¹⁶ And he longed to have his fill of the carob pods that the pigs were eating, and no one was giving him anything. ¹⁷ But when he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired laborers have more than enough bread, but I am dying here from hunger! ¹⁸ I will set out and go to my father, and will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in your sight; ¹⁹ I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me as one of your hired laborers.'" ²⁰ So he set out and came to his father. But when he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion for him, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. ²¹ And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' ²² But the father said to his slaves, 'Quickly bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet; ²³ and bring the fattened calf, slaughter it, and let's eat and celebrate; ²⁴ for this son of mine was dead and has come to life again; he was lost and has been found.' And they began to celebrate.

²⁵ "Now his older son was in the field, and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. ²⁶ And he summoned one of the servants and began inquiring what these things could be. ²⁷ And he said to him, 'Your brother has come, and your father has slaughtered the fattened calf because he has received him back safe and sound.' ²⁸ But he became angry and was not willing to go in; and his father came out and began pleading with him. ²⁹ But he answered and said to his father, 'Look! For so many years I have been serving you and I have never neglected a command of yours; and yet you never gave me a young goat, so that I might celebrate with my friends; ³⁰ but when this son of yours came, who has devoured your wealth with prostitutes, you slaughtered the fattened calf for him.' ³¹ And he said to him, 'Son, you have always been with me, and all that is mine is yours. ³² But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has begun to live, and was lost and has been found.'"

Introduction

This morning's sermon would have been a great Father's Day sermon, but I missed the opportunity this year. So, here we go, folks, I am doing that sermon today. I pray that all of us will learn about the heart of the father, especially the heart of our heavenly Father.

In order for us to understand and even have the heart of God, we need to carefully examine today's text Luke 15:11-32—the well-known story of prodigal son. Most of us are familiar with the parable, but it is always good to hear it again. Please bear with me as I share the story in my own words.

Content

A father had two sons. The prodigal one was the younger son of the two. He loved his father. Yet, he also loved his life. He wanted to have fun with friends. He yearned for an independent life. His home life and his hometown—they were O.K., yet, too small for him. He wanted to go out into the world in search of fun and adventure!

So, one day, he decided to put his heart's desire into action. He asked his father to divide up the property and to give his share of inheritance. Actually, it was very rude of him to ask—*demanding the inheritance money in advance*—before the father passed away?! Well, the father didn't seem to mind, so showing no disapproval, the father gave the rightful share to his younger son.

Guess what? Not many days passed when the younger son gathered everything he had and left home for a faraway place. He went as far as he could and squandered all the money by living a reckless life there (that is, drinking and partying with prostitutes—v.30).

Well, as you guessed, soon his money ran out, and to make things worse, a famine struck the region. Everybody scrambled for food, and he was no exception. As a matter of fact, he had no choice but to look for work and finally landed a job as a pig farmhand (v. 15). The famine was so severe in the land that the wages he earned weren't enough to fill his stomach. So hungry, the young wouldn't mind eating the pigs' food (that is, pods—v. 16), yet, even with that, no one gave it to him.

At last, he hit rock bottom and came to his senses (v. 17). He had three strikes against him (that was, being away from home, starving, and tending pigs—the worst job any Jew could have).

He remembered that his life at home was far better than the one he was having. He missed the abundance in his father's house where even the servants (hired hands) had food to spare, yet he was alone in a foreign country, starving to death, and no one would care.

So, he decided to return home acknowledging his sins against heaven and his father (v. 18, v. 21). He was coming home. E.g., Do you remember a song “Tie a Yellow Ribbon ‘Round the Ole Oak Tree” by Tony Orlando and Dawn? The song is based on a story of an ex-convict who is watching for a yellow handkerchief on a roadside oak. In May 1973, “Tie A Yellow Ribbon” sold 3 million records in three weeks [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tie_a_Yellow_Ribbon_Round_the_Ole_Oak_Tree].

Tony Orlando and Dawn

*I'm comin' home, I've done my time
Now I've got to know what is and isn't mine
If you received my letter telling you I'd soon be free
Then you'll know just what to do
If you still want me
If you still want me*

*Whoa, tie a yellow ribbon 'round the ole oak tree
It's been three long years
Do ya still want me (still want me)
If I don't see a ribbon 'round the ole oak tree
I'll stay on the bus
Forget about us
Put the blame on me
If I don't see a yellow ribbon 'round the ole oak tree*

*Bus driver, please look for me 'cause I couldn't bear to see what I might see
I'm really still in prison
And my love, she holds the key
A simple yellow ribbon's what I need to set me free
I wrote and told her please*

*Whoa, tie a yellow ribbon 'round the ole oak tree
It's been three long years
Do ya still want me (still want me)
If I don't see a ribbon 'round the ole oak tree
I'll stay on the bus
Forget about us
Put the blame on me
If I don't see a yellow ribbon 'round the ole oak tree*

*Now the whole damned bus is cheerin'
And I can't believe I see
A hundred yellow ribbons 'round the ole oak tree
I'm comin' home, mmm, mmm*

(Tie a ribbon 'round the ole oak tree)[4 x]

Back to today’s story: One day the father looked outside and saw a ragged man walking toward the house. When he realized that it was his prodigal son, he was filled with compassion (literal translation would be: his ‘guts’—known in Jesus’ time as the seat of innermost emotions--- ‘moved’), and he dashed toward to him, embraced, and kissed him.

Up until that time, the younger son rehearsed in his heart many times to say, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I don’t deserve to be your son. Consider me as one of your hired hands.” When he met his father, he was only able to say the first two sentences to him (*I have sinned against you and don’t deserve to be your son*). Before he

finished the last sentence “Consider me as one of your hired hands,” the father ordered his servants (slaves) to bring the best robe for the son. He also put a ring on the son’s finger and gave new sandals to wear—all signifying that the son was fully restored to the original status in the family. He is an heir again. The father welcomed the prodigal back to the family. It was more than the son deserved. It was far more than he had ever imagined.

Well, the father didn’t stop there. He wanted to welcome the son with a full-fledged party. So, he ordered a fattened calf to be killed and started the celebration with music and dance inviting all --family, servants, and even neighbors--to join.

While the party was going on, the older son was in the field working. Soon, he too was coming home. He began to hear the sound of music and dance coming from the house. When he asked one of the servants what was going on, he was told that his younger brother returned, and the father was throwing a party for him.

The older brother was furious. He was so angry with his father’s action that he refused to come into the house.

The father came out and asked why he wasn’t coming in. The elder son replied, “Even though I **slaved myself** (note the word the son is using here!) to serve you in all these years, and even though I did everything you asked me to, you never gave me even a goat to celebrate with my friends. Yet, for this son of yours who squandered all your money with prostitutes, you killed a calf? It’s NOT fair!!!”

The father consoled him saying, “Look, my son! You are always with me and all I have is yours. However, we must celebrate and rejoice your brother’s return, because he was dead and now alive. He was lost, but now he is found” (it reminds me of another song, *Amazing Grace*—Once I was lost but now I am found!).

The problem of the elder son was that he failed to understand the heart of the father. The father was not interested in fairness. He was not justifying what his younger son did. Neither was he going to remind his younger son how immoral he had been. However, one thing the father never would do was to say to his son, “You are not welcome here.” He was a father, after all, and his son just returned. In fact, he was just glad that his lost son, his dead son, came back home alive, in one piece. That’s what the father wanted to celebrate: the return of the prodigal, not what he had done. That was the father’s heart. That is the heart of our heavenly Father in God’s Kingdom: welcoming the sinner back to Him.

In fact, that’s the heart of the story, too. Here, we see the heart of God toward sinners demonstrated as follows: long suffering, compassionate, gracious, running toward the totally undeserving child of God, embracing, kissing, restoring the prodigal to be an heir

again, and welcoming the sinner with a generous and heart-felt celebration. God's heart always overflows with grace to offer such favor that no sinner deserves.

We mustn't forget such a heart of God is also the heart of evangelism. The sole purpose of evangelism is to invite those who have sinned against God back to the family of God. Every evangelistic effort compassionately embraces those who come back to God's household by their own volition after years of life away from God.

Conclusion

Each year our church has about 10 visitors. We didn't invite them. They just walk in, because they want to come back home to God and His Church.

My question is this: How do we welcome them? With what kind of heart do we welcome them to God's flock? Is our heart so full of joy that we want to run toward them like the father did? Is our heart ready to embrace and welcome them with a celebration of music and dance? Or, do we rather remain aloof, showing no enthusiasm, whatsoever? Is such an attitude acceptable to God? We pray that all our visitors receive a heart-felt welcome here at MUMC.

May God help us to understand the heart of God and therefore practice a radical hospitality for all who come to the Lord!

So, next time at church when you see someone new to you or to our congregation....

- Say hello with a smile. Take the initiative.
- Show genuine interest in them.
- Welcome them with gusto.

Amen.