

THE PRODIGAL SON - A MONOLOGUE SERMON

-- Sermon by Rev. Slayden Yarbrough given at First/Boulder on August 17, 2008

Text: Luke 15: 11-32

Introduction: As a retired teacher I like to point out that Jesus was known more for being a teacher than a preacher. He used numerous teaching techniques to proclaim his message, including similes, hyperbole, poetry, etc. But his most well-known technique was the **parable**. A parable was a story or teaching device that always seemed to have in mind the **question “To what can this be compared?”** The use of parables is found in most cultures and the art of story telling is a great gift. Jesus was a master at teaching with parables and there are more than 50 found in the Synoptic Gospels alone.

Collections of parables: A parable does not have to be a true story but it contains truth in the form of a short story. Several well-known parables are found in Matthew 13, including the parable of the sower, the wheat and the tares, the mustard seed, the leaven, the hidden treasure, the pearl of great price, and the fisherman’s net. In Luke 15 there are three famous parables, the parables of the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost son. This morning we are going to look at the parable of the lost son, which is better known as the parable of the Prodigal Son. I will present this story through the eyes of that son, using another teaching device known as the monologue. Next Sunday the older brother will show up to tell his side of the story. So I give to you the Prodigal Son.

Monologue of the Prodigal Son:

Well, good morning! Wow, here I am, back home in the comfort of my family and friends, sleeping in my own bed, basking in the glow of a nice party with my friends. Boy, did those steaks taste great!! This is a lot different than the situation that I found myself in just a few weeks ago, and to be honest with you, not exactly what I expected. So, you want to know what I’m talking about? Well, most of you already have heard my story but let me take a few minutes and re-tell it from my perspective.

For starters I am the younger of two sons in a world that certainly favors being first born. For example, the first-born becomes the leader of the family, not because he has done anything to deserve it but simply because he happened to be born first. Those of us untimely born don’t have a chance to use our talents and abilities. We simply are left out when it comes to succeeding our father as head of the house. And not only that, the first-born gets a double portion of the inheritance when my father’s estate “matures.” Let me ask you, what did my older brother ever do to deserve a double share of everything? Not much. Quite simply, he was born before me. Big deal! So what?

I’ll tell you this, my older brother is very difficult to get along with. He thinks that he is in charge around here and that I am just another servant. He is so bossy, so pushy. He acts like he owns this place, not my father. I don’t know why my father puts up with him, but he does.

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Speaking of my father, he really is a good person, a very good father. However, he is too tolerant of my arrogant brother. But he does seem to genuinely appreciate all that he does. And, he has always seemed to accept and understand me. I am sure that I have caused him to lose sleep at night. But what son hasn't? Well, maybe my dull and boring older brother, but he is the exception.

So, what was I to do? There was no future here for me, unless I wanted to be a puppet in the hands of my older brother. I wanted some adventure, I wanted to see the world, I wanted to do things my way, I wanted to show that I am worth something, that I have dreams and ideas, that I can succeed out there without my older brother looking over my shoulder.

That's why I did what I did not too long ago. I decided to go to my father and demand, no, ask for my share of the inheritance. Of course, I only get a third of the inheritance. My brother gets 2/3s, you know. Still, I'll take what I can get and I might as well get it now. Our culture allows that, you know. So, I decided to set out on my own and prove to my father and brother - and to myself - that I can make my own way without looking over my shoulder to see if my brother is watching. He always seems to be watching everything that I do.

So, I took my inheritance, walked out the door, marched down the road, shoulders held high, and set out to discover my future. Boy that felt good! Boy, was I excited. I wanted to get as far away from this place as I could - and away from my brother, of course. I headed for a distant place that I had heard of and that had never heard of me, I might add.

It didn't take me too many days to arrive at my destination. Nice city, wide open, lots of opportunities for a young man out to show the world what he was made of. And, of course, I made lots and lots of new friends. I'm a very likable guy, and they seemed to like a person who had a sense of freedom, adventure, a dreamer, and a doer. That's me! They also seemed to like the fact that I had quite a bit of money to spread around and that I was generous with my resources. Wouldn't you like me? Of course, you would.

Boy, did I have a good time. New friends. No rules. Party into the night. No older brother checking up on me. It doesn't get any better than that. Or, at least until the money ran out. For some reason, my new friends also disappeared after the money disappeared. I don't know where they went. But they sure left in a hurry!

But that was OK. I was tired of all the parties and it was time for me to get to work and show the world that I would be a great success. But boy, was that bad timing! The problem was that there was a famine in the land. Money and work were scarce. There was no job to found. I was destitute, people. I looked and looked and looked for work. I was out of money, out of friends, and out of luck. The one person who really cared for me, my father, was a long way off. Even my older brother would have looked pretty good right then. Did I just really say that? I must have been hallucinating!

Finally, I found a job, the only one around. It wasn't much but I was desperate. I found a job feeding swine. For a young Jewish lad it doesn't get much lower than that. It would have been humiliating - if I hadn't been so broke - and so hungry. The food for the pigs was the pods of the

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carob trees. It was also eaten by the very poor and for domestic animals. **Pride** disappears when you are hungry. I found myself eating the food for pigs.

I was at the very lowest point in my life. Desperate people sometimes take desperate measures. In my case, I had to take a realistic view of my situation, humble myself, and make one of the toughest decisions of my life. I “came to myself,” that’s a good way of putting it. I took a hard, honest look at where **my decisions** had brought me. And, I didn’t like it one bit. But all of my problems were my own doing. I could not blame my situation on anyone else, not even my older brother.

I decided I would go home. Home may not be a good term. I had forfeited everything that I had there. But I knew that even the servants in my father’s home had a much better life than I did. So I decided to go back and ask, beg just to be a servant in my father’s house. I had no right to anything else, and maybe not even that. But, as I told you, my father is a good man, and perhaps he might show a little mercy and give me a job as a servant. That would be a lot better than feeding pigs and eating their food.

I also could see my brother. He wouldn’t like for me to return. No doubt he loved it when I left - except for me taking my inheritance. He also would not hesitate to say to anyone who would listen that I told you so. Big brothers are like that, you know. He would probably never let up in pointing out what a failure I was. But if that’s what it takes, that’s what it takes. He would be right. But he also would be unable to show any mercy whatsoever. And I might add that my mistakes would not make him a better person, although he would try to plant that conclusion in the minds of others.

So, my decision was made. I set out toward home. I worked on my speech all the way the back. I am sure that many of you have done the same thing when facing a difficult situation, maybe even confrontation. I planned to go right up to my father, head bowed, hat in hand, and tell him that I had sinned against God and him. You know, disobedience to your parents is in a sense disobedience to God. I know enough of the commandments to understand that.

I decided to tell him that I was no longer worthy to be called one of his sons - and I wasn’t. I had denied every right to be considered a son of my father. I would simply ask -maybe beg - to be considered as one of his hired hands. I went over and over my speech. I had plenty of time on the road home, er, the road back, to get it down just the way I wanted to. I was embarrassed - but I was ready. I knew whom I was and what I had to do. When you face yourself with complete honesty, you can find the courage to face anything before you. You can find the strength to be genuinely humble.

And I will tell you this. It was a lot better to be the Number Two at home than the Number One in a pig pen. It would even be much better to be a servant in my father’s house than Number One in a swine palace.

I was ready to face my past, ready to try and rebuild my future. I was still at a distance when I saw a familiar figure coming towards me. He was in a hurry. He looked really familiar. I quickly realized that it was my father, who had seen me coming.

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I got the impression that he must have been looking for me, expecting me to return someday. He was genuinely glad to see me. He grabbed me, hugged me, and kissed me. I was not expecting such a response. I quickly gave him my prepared speech. It was almost as though he didn't even hear me.

He immediately called out to one of his servants to quickly do three things. First, he told him to bring the best robe and put it on me. Then, he told him to put a ring on my finger. Finally, he told him to put sandals on my feet. Now, lest you think these are insignificant matters, they are not.

The robe signifies royalty. I was seen as a prominent member of my father's household, even though I no longer deserved it.

The ring was not just an ordinary ring. It was a signet ring. It symbolized authority. It was used to seal official documents. One would press down the family seal on wax, so that any reader would know that the document was valid. The ring on my finger symbolized that I was recognized as a true member of my father's family. I wasn't a servant. I was truly a son!

Finally, the sandals represented sonship. Sons wore sandals. Servants did not. By the robe, the ring, and the sandals, my father was saying that I was his son! As wayward as I had been, as foolish as I had acted, my father still loved me and accepted me as his son.

Not only that, my return for my father was a cause for celebration. He planned a party, invited my friends and the neighbors, and prepared the fatted calf. It was an event fit for a king! I never felt so unworthy while at the same time so happy. It was good to be back home surrounded by the love of my father and friends. In fact, my father saw me as a dead son who had come back to life.

As for my brother, well, I'll let him tell you his story at another time. I'm sure that it will be very revealing and very interesting.

So, what should you make of all of this? Maybe the answer lies in the teaching of a rabbi and a prophet that I heard about during my "prodigal" stage of life. If I remember correctly, he was from Nazareth. He apparently wasn't like those legalistic teachers, the Scribes and Pharisees. All they ever do is tell you what you can't do. Oh, he saw value in the law. But he saw something much deeper. He understood people, their needs, and their shortcomings. He called for us to love one another, to accept each other, and to work at growing in our relationship to our neighbors and even our enemies. This teacher really sounded radical, that's for sure. But he also made a lot of sense.

And he called for us to grow in our relationship with God. You don't think much about God when you are living a wayward life like I was. But I was told that this teacher - was his name Jesus? - he taught us to pray to God like this - "Our father who is in heaven." What an interesting way of looking at God - as our father. Do you know what? After seeing how my father treated me upon my return, that makes a lot of sense. My father had every reason not to

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love me, but he did. He could have thrown me off his place but he didn't. He knew who I was; he knew of my failures and shortcomings; he knew how weak I was.

But he opened his arms, he accepted me; he loved me; and he rejoiced when I came home.

Is God like that? I think so. We fail him; we reject him; we disappoint him. But he is always ready to receive us back with open arms. I didn't have a long list of good deeds to defend myself. I hadn't kept the law, that was easy to document; in fact, one could start at my failure to honor my father and mother, and go from there.

All I could do was confess my failures, my shortcomings, and my mistakes. All I could do was say that I was unworthy and ask to simply be a servant in my father's household. And all he did was love me and accept me fully and completely as his son. I still paid the consequences of my past. But in the eyes and the actions of my father, I was truly his son. And I am really glad to be able to say that!

I think that the prophet from Nazareth was right on target. God is our father and we are his children. I am sure that most of you listening to me understand exactly what I am saying. If not, think about my story and think about how God loves you as a son or a daughter. Hopefully, all of us will recognize that our journey will make us more humble, make us more aware of the father's love, and make us realize how fortunate we are to be able to call God "Our Father."

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