

A FATHER AND TWO SONS: A DRAMATIC PRESENTATION

-- Sermon by Rev. Slayden Yarbrough given at First/Boulder on August 24, 2008

Text: Luke 15: 11-32

Introduction: Last week we looked at the story of the wayward son, as seen through the eyes of the Prodigal, as he is called. I pointed out that Jesus was an outstanding teacher, who used most effectively the teaching technique of the parable, a word that means "to cast alongside." I pointed out that a parable was a story that always seemed to have in mind the **question "To what can this be compared?"** Although not unique in terms of his use of parables, Jesus was a master at teaching with parables and there are more than 50 found in the Synoptic Gospels alone.

Parables in Luke: In the Gospel of Luke, a number of parables are found. Luke has a special interest in the underdogs of society, such as Gentiles or non-Jews, women, those physically challenged, children, and those rejected according to the standards of the Pharisees and Sadducees. Paralleling these thoughts, Luke, who is the only non-Jewish writer in the New Testament, emphasizes the universality of the good news.

In chapter 15 Luke records three famous parables, the parables of the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost son, all of which demonstrate the care that God has for those who often were rejected by Palestinian society and religion of the first century, and those whom God was seeking out to make beneficiaries of His love and concern.

This morning we are going to continue to examine the parable of a father and his two sons, which is better known collectively as the parable of the Prodigal Son. Perhaps we could call today's lesson the parable of the "Older Son." We will present this story through the eyes of the father, and primarily through the older, loyal, hard-working son who takes a legalistic approach to life, having previously

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studied the freedom loving, wayward, younger, Prodigal Son. The Father of the two boys has something to say, and to introduce us to his eldest son..

Father: Good morning! It's great to be here in Boulder. Your city reminds me of the city where my younger son journeyed off to not long ago to engage in some rather frivolous living! That venture proved to be a real learning experience for this young man.

Let me begin by asking you a question. How many of you present today have children, especially sons? Being a parent is quite a challenge. There is no question about that. I have two sons. My oldest is a hard worker, disciplined, dedicated, dependable, and committed to clear and simple rules and regulations. He has few questions in life and he anticipates the day when, how shall I say this, when I am no longer around. He will assume leadership in our family!

My younger son, well he is like most sons who are the youngest - adventuresome, free, living for the moment. In fact, I understand that he showed up here recently and told you his story. I'll bet that was interesting, and maybe even enlightening. He has always had a unique take on life, and he has a colorful way with words. And I am sure that you realized that he never lacks genuine enthusiasm. He is certainly optimistic, unlike his older brother who seems to find something negative to say no matter what the situation might be.

I love both of my sons, but sometimes - well, those of you who have more than one son, or maybe even more than one child, you know what I'm talking about.

So today, I have asked my oldest son to come and tell you his story, to see things through his eyes. I do believe in fair play and in allowing all sides to be heard. I can't say that for everyone, that's for sure. And I have learned that it's not very wise of me to try and speak for either of my children.

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Here comes my eldest now. I encourage you to listen carefully to what he has to say, even if you don't agree with him. He can do a better job than I can. So listen with me. He's almost here. And he won't have to worry about his younger brother. He will be along a little later, as soon as he wakes up!

Elder Son: Good morning, and I do mean morning. I love being out here working when the sun comes up. And I will keep working until the sun goes down. I do enjoy work. I find it most invigorating, don't you?

Let me tell you something right up front that I think is very important for you to understand concerning my point of view. Everything that I have - and will have - *I will have earned*, that's for certain. Early to bed, early to rise, that's my motto. Too bad that younger son of my father doesn't see things my way. What a waste he is. My father's other son, he's in there sleeping while I'm out here slaving away. He makes so mad. Let me tell you this about him. He is allergic to work. In fact, I don't even think he can spell "work."

But that's not even the half of it. Let me tell you what happened not too long ago. I know that he has already told some of you his interpretation of these events. But you need to know the truth, what really happened, and what it all means. I might point out that it was so disgusting, and it just infuriates me when I think about it. But I suppose that if I try really hard, that I can talk about it without getting too upset.

For starters *I am the older of two sons in a world that certainly favors being first born*. As first born, I am - or will become - the leader of the family, not because I happened to be born first. From the time I entered this world, I have been working and training to take over from my father when the time comes - although you and I know that even now I am already carrying out most of the responsibilities, while my father sits back and watches! I have spent years of studying, watching, observing, and most of all doing! All that my father's

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youngest has had to do is sit around day dreaming. His mind is always off somewhere else - and I am left to do the work! I know he is jealous of me. You can see it in his eyes. He imagines that he could do things so much better than I can. What a joke! He doesn't have a clue about how to run this place, or how hard it really is.

People have the idea that I have it made. Being the oldest, it's true that I am next in line when it comes to leadership of our family. That is when my father either becomes too old, or passes on. And I am entitled to a double share of the family estate, when my father is no longer around.

But let me tell this. I repeat, I will have earned everything that I will receive when that day comes - everything! I have always been ***obedient*** to my father (even when I thought he was wrong! - and boy, has he been wrong a lot lately!). I have ***worked day in and day out***, from sun up to sunset. When something needed to be done, I saw that it was done. I have learned to plan, to be ***frugal*** in finances, to lead. Leadership is not something you are born with. You learn it and you earn it. That's the way that I see it. Don't you?

And what makes me really upset is that this ***younger son of my father***, he shows me no respect. I have to pull teeth to get him to do any work. His mind is always somewhere else. Did I mention that ***he's always dreaming, never doing, like me***. I am the one who plans the day, purchases the materials and supplies that we need just to operate this farm, this business, and keeps the books. Nothing would ever get done if my father's "youngest" was in charge. I am sure you see what I am trying to say, don't you?

I'll tell you this, my father's other son is very difficult to get along with. He thinks that he could do a better job than I can. Do you believe his arrogance? He believes that he is smarter than I am, and that I am simply old-fashioned and out of touch with the "modern world." Can you imagine what this place would look like

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under his control - at least until he destroyed it? I don't know why my father puts up with him - but he does.

Speaking of my father, he is nice enough and really is a very friendly, kind person. However, he is too tolerant of his younger son. But he does seem to genuinely appreciate all that I do. But I wish he would realize that I have earned his respect and support, not his younger son. Look, I am not flashy. I'm really conservative on all matters - religion, finances, views, commitments - and I'm right - real right! So I am a little dull - dull is good, don't you agree?

But let me get back to that prodigal. Let me tell you what he did not too long ago. He had the **audacity** to go to my father and ask for his inheritance. We're talking about a third of my father's estate - **a third, mind you!** What did he ever do to earn a third of anything? I was livid, I'll tell you that. Our culture allows that, you know. I hate these new liberal ideas, don't you? I guess the idea is to make sure that all the children get a share - simply by being born! I think the estate should be divided the old-fashioned way - you earn what you get, like I will, of course!

So, away he went. he took his inheritance, walked out the door, marched down the road, shoulders held high, and set out to discover his future. What a joke! But he was sure in a hurry. It was obvious that he wanted to get as far away from this place as fast as he could - and away from me, of course.

Good riddance, that's what I said. Of course, I would have preferred that my father simply kick him out, throw him **off of my - er, our - place** without a shekel. Then we would see if he could make it in this world! Besides, my father's younger son, he just got in the way around here. He was, and always will be, worthless.

From what I hear, *he made lots and lots of new friends*. Well, actually, he bought lots of new friends. He thought people liked him because he had a sense of freedom, adventure, a dreamer, and a doer. I sure you don't believe that. These

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new friends liked him because he had quite a bit of money to spread around and that he didn't mind throwing it away. Wouldn't you like him? Of course, you would. I might have even liked him! Naw, I don't think so.

What a waste. No rules. Party into the night. No one like me to keep him in line. I'll bet he thought he was on top of the world. At least ***until the money ran out.*** For some reason, his new friends also disappeared after the money disappeared. **What a shocker!**

That prodigal. He wasted everything **we** had. All of that money gone, as I now understand it. ***But I'm not surprised, are you?*** I suppose it was worth it, getting rid of him. And, I hoped that he would never come back. He has never done a thing to deserve setting foot on this place again.

And if you think things couldn't get worse, wait until you hear what happened next. Guess what! There was a ***famine*** in the land. Money and work were scarce. ***He couldn't find a job!*** He wouldn't have known what to do if he had! He was destitute, people, a bum, a beggar. He was out of money, out of friends, and out of luck. And, he deserved it all! ***The one person who really could have helped him, who could have put him back on the straight and narrow - me - was a long way off.*** I'll bet that ***even I would have looked pretty good right then.***

Then I heard that he found a job, the only one around. ***The job he found was feeding swine.*** What a tragedy. I nearly died laughing when I heard that. It doesn't get much lower than that. Can you imagine that, a Jew even being near those unclean animals? Well, that's what happens when you cavort with Gentiles.

I was hoping that my father's younger son would be so humiliated that he would never entertain the thought of coming back here. I would have met him at the gate and sent him back to his fair weather friends and his pigs! That's what I would have done. He never has done a thing to deserve any compassion, any understanding.

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But then there's my father. He is so gullible. I wish that my father would see things the way that I do. His younger son has the wool pulled over his eyes, that's for certain. I could just see his other son coming down the road, hat in hand, head bowed down in mock humility, groveling about how sorry he is, and begging for forgiveness. I could have become nauseous!

Well, you know what happened next! Just what I predicted! I was not surprised to see that prodigal coming down the road. I was out in the field working. I'm always somewhere working. I had expected this day for a long time. And I had dreaded it for a long time, as well. I know my father all too well. He is so, so soft, so gullible. For me, you get once chance and that's it. No do overs for me.

And then what happened next was not unexpected but still, it really upset me. There was my father, rushing down the road to meet that wayward, worthless, lazy reprobate.

He could have had a heart attack. Of course, then I would have taken over completely and I could have thrown that other son off of this place forever. But I shouldn't think such thoughts, should I? I couldn't take. I took off to work in another field, as far away as I could get from this debacle. Work, work, work. And what has it gotten me? My father loves his other son a lot more than he loves me, that seems for certain.

Then matters got even worse! I was told by one of my workers that my father 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 that reprobate. Then, he told him to put a ring on his finger. Finally, he told him to put sandals on his feet. Now, lest you think these are insignificant matters, they are not.

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

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The ring was not just an ordinary ring. It was a signet ring. It symbolized authority, power. 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 his finger symbolized that he was recognized as a true member of my father's family.

Finally, the sandals represented sonship. Sons wore sandals. Servants did not. By the robe, the ring, and the sandals, *my father was saying that this person who had demeaned the family name was his son!* As wayward as he had been, as foolish as he had acted, my father still loved him and accepted him as his son! How could any father love someone who had betrayed his entire family? Do you understand what I am saying?

What did he ever do to be called a son? He certainly has not earned that right, as I have.

Not only that, his return for my father was a cause for celebration. He planned a party, invited his wayward friends and the neighbors, and prepared the fatted calf. It was an event fit for a king! And such a waste.

My father, so gullible, so naïve, so . . . you fill in the blank. Besides, he never gave a party for me, never killed a fatted calf for me, not even a small goat for me, and never invited in my friends to celebrate with me. Besides, I don't have many friends.

My father, he reminds me of this teacher from Nazareth in Galilee that I have been hearing about. He says that He has a way that is better than the law? What could be better than the law? Rules, regulations, everything as clear as can be. I like that. I love the law. What a radical. But I'll bet my father's youngest would like him. No responsibility, no accountability - I like that **no account** ability. That's pretty funny for a guy who has no sense of humor.

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This teacher, I believe his name was Jesus, I was told that he taught his followers to pray to God like this - "Our father who is in heaven." *What an pathetic way of looking at God - as our father.*

I hope that this Jesus didn't have my father in mind when he referred to God as "father." Why would we need the law? All one would have to do is go out and live a riotous life, then come crawling back, be forgiven, and accepted into full sonship. I couldn't take that. You have to keep the law. You have to earn God's love, don't you?

But, I have to admit, my father loves me. He went out to meet that sorry son of his when he came home. I would have stood on the porch, arms crossed, with a cold stare that would have drilled a hole right through him! But when I wouldn't go in and celebrate his other son's return, my father came out to talk with me. He met me on my turf, just like he did his other son.

He assured me that all that was coming to me would not change. That was really important to me! He called his other son "my brother," something that I just cannot bring myself to do. He told me "my brother was dead, but is now alive." If I could be sure that my father loved me as much as he does his other son, then maybe . . .

He invited me in to join the celebration. What would you do? I think that was asking too much, don't you? Don't you?

Do you think that all that one has to do to be right with God is to confess his failures, his shortcomings, and his mistakes. All one needs to do is say that he or she is unworthy and ask to simply be a servant in the father's household. Is that all it takes? What do you think? Does God love us so much that He can forgive us, no matter what we have done? I am having a real struggle with this idea. Does God's love overcome His demand for justice? I don't know. What do you think?

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Father: Well, there it is? You see how hard it is to be a father with two sons so different from each other. I love both of them. And it's not based upon who they are, or what they have done. My love is founded upon who I am. Parents, we love our children for all of the good and all of the bad that they do. And this will not change.

Maybe my understanding of what it means to be a father does have some spiritual truth to it. 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, regardless of whom you are and what you have done. Hopefully, all of you will recognize that your journey will make you more humble, make you more aware of the father's love, and make you realize how fortunate we are to be able to call God "Our Father."

Welcome home, all of my children!

Narrator: We have seen a wonderful story from Jesus through the eyes of its three characters. The teachings are so relevant. With God as our Father, we are all sisters and brothers in Christ. We are certainly different from each other. But we are a part of the same family, the family of God.

A good friend of mine from my early teaching days had a small cardboard sign a shelf behind his desk. It said, "We don't have to be twins to be brothers!" How true that is. I think the parable of the Prodigal bears witness to that truth. But we are brothers and sisters and because of that we all need to learn from our one Father that we can love each other and also the world. We are truly one in the bond of love.

**Following the hymn of commitment, close with recitation of the Lord's Prayer, emphasizing "OUR FATHER."*

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