

Life-giving Lessons: The Trouble with Kids, Part 1

Luke 15:1-2

Rev. Lynell M. Caudillo

August 13, 2017

Set the stage for listening to this most familiar of biblical stories Jesus told about two sons.

“Now the tax collectors and sinners were all gathering around to hear Jesus. ² But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, “This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.”

Luke 15: 11-32

¹¹ Jesus continued: “There was a man who had two sons. ¹² The younger one said to his father, ‘Father, give me my share of the estate.’ So he divided his property between them.

¹³ “Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living. ¹⁴ After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. ¹⁵ So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. ¹⁶ He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything.

¹⁷ “When he came to his senses, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired servants have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! ¹⁸ I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. ¹⁹ I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired servants.’ ²⁰ So he got up and went to his father.

“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.

²¹ “The son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’

²² “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. ²³ Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let’s have a feast and celebrate. ²⁴ For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’ So they began to celebrate.

²⁵ “Meanwhile, the older son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. ²⁶ So he called one of the servants and asked him what was going on. ²⁷ ‘Your brother has come,’ he replied, ‘and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.’

²⁸ “The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him. ²⁹ But he answered his father, ‘Look! All these years I’ve been slaving for you and never disobeyed

your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. ³⁰ But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!

³¹ “‘My son,’ the father said, ‘you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. ³² But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’”

PRAY.

How many of you are the youngest in your family?

Me too.

It's tough being the youngest, right??

Everybody is always making comparisons.

Teachers would say to me: Ooh...you're related to!

What does that mean??

Obviously teachers have a preconceived idea about me, because I'm related to him/her.

Well, give it up. I am so NOT him. He is so NOT me.

And you know, parents don't help. They're not supposed to have favorites! But Dad always liked him best. Of course he'd deny it! He doesn't have to *say* anything, everyone just *knows*.

I've made up my mind. I am ready to get outta Dodge, and see the world.

Hey Dad—I'll be polite (NOT) and instead of saying “I wish you were dead”, just give me what's coming to me-- 1/3 of your assets—see even there, big bro gets the better deal of 2/3—give me what's mine and I'll get outta your hair. No more need to worry about me. I won't be a cause for concern anymore. You and your first born can celebrate and get on with life-- without me.

I'll be fine. Good bye and good riddance.

So I grabbed my bag, collected my share of dad's loot and hit the road. I was eager to get as far away from home as I could get.

Wow it felt great—to be free from expectations, free from being compared to him, free to do whatever I want, whenever I want, with whomever I want!

It was fun...I had friends, lots of new friends.

As long as I had money, no one was a stranger. Together we wined and dined, hit the hot spots for partying. Indeed, eatin', drinkin', and merry-makin' was the order of the day! Let's just say, no expense was spared in having a good time, in *every* possible way. (You can use your imagination on that one!)

That was the beginning of the end—or was it?

Anyway, when the money ran out, the friends did too, things changed. I was couch surfing for a while but pretty soon no one wanted to let me hang with them.

I pawned what few possessions I had, tried to take out a payday loan. That was a joke. My pay days were over. Tried to find work. No one was hiring. Besides what marketable skills did I have? Party planner? Not so much...

Finally, a desperate farm manager offered me a job feeding his pigs, and I was desperate enough to accept! Slopping pigs?? How low can a Jewish kid go? It's hard to imagine a worse job. It was, well....disgusting...at best.

But it was there...in the aromatic pig pen, knee deep in mud and muck, that it dawned on me: Even my dad's hired hands have more to eat, and better food to eat, not to mention better working conditions, than I do! What the heck am I doing here? Really? How did I come to this? What happened?

The way Luke tells it, I "came to my senses"—the way he says it, it is as if I had been in a coma and I regained consciousness! Honestly, I guess that is a pretty good description!

I'd become numb to my situation/surroundings. I was focused only on survival. Given the circumstances, it was easy to have a change of heart and mind.

Whatever happened, whatever you want to call it, I decided to throw caution to the wind, and risk returning home...

Risk rejection by my ol' man,
risk ridicule of former friends and neighbors, for surely by now everyone in town was well aware of what I had done,
risk the plight of actually becoming a servant in my father's household.
Anything would be an improvement over what I'd been doing, that's for sure!
So I quit my auspicious position in the pig pen, and headed home. a
Yep, I did an about face.

While I walked toward home, I rehearsed exactly what I would say to my dad. Have you ever done that?

I'd been such a fool, I didn't want to blow what was likely my one and only chance to get it right. "Dad – I've sinned against heaven and against you. I'm not worthy of the family name. Any chance you'd take me on as a hired hand?!"

At this point...the focus of the story switches to the waiting father. We'll hear from him next week.

How many of you are the eldest in your family??

Yep, being the oldest has its perks, but it also has its obligations.

But the worst part is having to put up with my bratty younger brother. That kid is so annoying: self-centered, thoughtless, careless. He doesn't give a darn about anyone but himself! He thinks he's the center of the universe!

Besides being totally irresponsible, he is downright despicable...he has no regard for social expectations, no regard for our family name or reputation.

Who does he think he is? I'll tell you...He's an affront to the family. He's not worthy to be called a son.

Especially when *I* have been so *respectful*...doing whatever my father asks, trying to anticipate his every wish so that I can be deserving of his favor.

My brother and I are like polar opposites:

I work hard. He hardly worked!

I don't complain. That's all he ever did!

I get up before the sun and work until after it set.

If he was up by noon, well, that was early for him.

I am always compliant, trying to please my father.

Him? He only does what he wants, to please himself. No one else. Ever.

So when he went to dad and asked for his share of our inheritance—well, this is unheard of! It's as if he said to our father: "I wish you were dead!"

See what I mean? He doesn't care if he hurts Dad, he just wants to get his own way. He thinks only of *himself* and what *he* wants, to the exclusion of everyone else!

What is worse, he's got everyone fooled—to the extent that he has our dad wrapped around his little finger!

Dad will do whatever he asks...even granting this outrageous request for his!!

Unbelievable!!

Meanwhile, I am slaving away...er..uh..I'm *not* a slave, I'm the *eldest* son!

I understand duty and responsibility. I do what is necessary to uphold our family name and reputation. I work hard. I do *everything* that is expected of me, *and more*. As the eldest, I have do have some privileges. Eventually I'll get what's coming to me, and you know what? I deserve every bit of it. Unlike my brother who is totally irresponsible, I've earned it.

+++++

When Jesus first told this story there were two groups listening: the "tax collectors" and sinners, and the scribes and Pharisees who were the good synagogue going folks. The first group was despised by the second group.

So here are two brothers, two sons, two very different people from the same family of origin, yet they appear to be worlds apart.

What do the two have in common, besides genetics/their parents?

The younger son...is his repentance sincere or selfish? Could he be playing his father not just once, in order to get his inheritance, and now a second time when he returns? What is his motivation?

The elder son is obedient, but...how long did he suffer in silence, with resentment and bitterness building inside of him?

Did he/do we mistake restraint for righteousness?

While he remained at home physically, did he leave home/father in other ways?

This is the third parable in a trio of lost-ness: the lost sheep, the lost coin, the lost son...or sons.

Which of these two sons is lost? The younger or the elder? Are both of them lost—each in his own way?? Which of the two do you think the tax collectors and sinners identified with? And the scribes and Pharisees? Which one did you identify with? Are you lost?

Of this we can be sure: the lost will be found, and the love of the Father is great enough to embrace both of the sons, and each one of us—no matter where we are.

Trouble with kids continues...next week focus on the Father.

Join me in prayer.