

## A Son, A Father, And A Brother

Luke 15:1-3, 11-32

Trinity Lutheran – Kearney, Missouri

March 10, 2013 – Fourth Sunday In Lent



Grace to you, and peace, from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. Given the nature of the 24 hour news cycle, it's not unusual to hear about folks who have tragedy strike their lives. I can remember an interesting case a few years ago here in Kansas City that involved some twins who were both in need of an organ transplant. Their insurance wouldn't pay, and their parents couldn't afford the operation. The interesting thing wasn't that this happened, since I'm sure such things happen quite regularly, but it's what happened afterward. When people all around the area heard about it, a bunch of them got together and began a grassroots movement to collect money to help pay for the operation. So, in a time of great need, this obscure family whom no one had even heard of before, found out that there were a quite a few others who cared about their problem – even though, before that, they didn't even know who they were.

Now if you've ever wondered whether or not God is aware of the problems in your life – if He's really concerned about your day-to-day worries, cares, frustrations, and temptations – then today might be a good opportunity for you to examine once again some of the stories found in St. Luke's Gospel. There you'll read narratives about common, everyday people – the widow of Nain; Zacchaeus; the woman who washed Jesus' feet with her tears and her hair; and of course, the reading appointed for today, the story of the Prodigal Son.

This story isn't simply a fairy tale account of a young lad from a long time ago in a land far, far away. No, rather it's a story about you. It's a story about you and your relationship with God. It begins – if you can imagine – with a son who goes to his father with a request that his future inheritance be given to him even before his father was on his deathbed! From the get-go it isn't hard to see how this young man's selfishness was ruling his life – but the Scriptures also paint a picture of a father who's wonderfully generous. Now, as a parent, I can't imagine I doing the same thing under similar

circumstances – but yet, that's exactly what *this* father did for his son, even though he knew the likely outcome of his action.

And of course, this son did exactly as his father knew he would – He went out and squandered everything he had received on “loose living.” In similar fashion, God – *our* true Father – has also given us an inheritance. Not only has He given us the promise of eternal life through the work of His Son, but He's also given us a goodly number of other treasures. How much of this inheritance have you spent wisely? How much of it have you used in Godly ways? How much of it have you squandered selfishly on yourself and your own wants and desires? If you're going to be honest, you'd have to conclude that precious few of us have used this inheritance wisely – and that the sin of using this inheritance unwisely almost always brings about a tragic end.

And that's precisely what happened to the Prodigal, isn't it? Soon he “began to be in want.” Rather than living in the lap of luxury as he had envisioned, he soon found himself living in squalor, feeding another's man's pigs. Living in conditions better suited for farm animals, he realized that he had no real friends, and that He had nowhere to go. You see, those who disobey God's will almost always end up the same way. While it may not happen as graphically as depicted here in this text, it always happens. The person who ignores God ultimately finds that at the end of his life there's nothing left. As he moves further away from God's Word, the fellowship of believers, and the ministry of the Church, he finds himself in the midst of spiritual squalor – all alone, with nothing but despair and damnation as his companions.

But what should you do when you find yourself sharing the fate of the Prodigal? Well, what did he do? Did he look for some benefactor to come along and bail him out? Did he think he could pull himself up by his own bootstraps? No. Jesus says, “He came to his senses.” Reality hit him squarely between the eyes. He reached the conclusion that all this was his fault, and no one else's. The only solu-

tion left for him was to go to his father and throw himself on his mercy. And that, by the way, must be your solution as well. If you haven't done everything right – and you haven't. If you haven't been the kind of Christian God desires you to be – and you haven't. If you've neglected the study of God's Word in your life, failing to take advantage of all the many opportunities God gives you in His Church – and that is precisely what you have done. And if you haven't been pulling your fair share here in this world and Church – which you haven't – who's to blame? You are! What are you to do? Like the Prodigal, there's only one solution before you, and that's to repent and throw yourself on the mercy of our Heavenly Father.

Only then can you gain a new start – and indeed, isn't that precisely what this story is all about? When the son decides to turn to His Father's mercy, notice how, while he was still a good distance off, the father began to run toward him. Before he could even get a word out of his mouth, the father had wrapped his arms around his neck, placed a coat on his back, a ring on his finger, and cried out for joy that his son had returned. And it's interesting to note that the word used here in the original text to refer to the father's compassion is the *only* other time it's ever used apart from the compassion God shows us in the cross of His Son. In other words, the compassion this man showed toward his son is the very same compassion God has for you when you come seeking His forgiveness.

So, getting back to my original question. Even when times are tough and things aren't going your way, is it proper to conclude that God doesn't care for you? Of course not! God most certainly does care, and He is always standing ready to forgive you and take you back. Just remember the story of the Prodigal. He had foolishly spent his father's money on riotous living and needlessly had squandered *everything* his father had given him. By his actions and life he had brought shame to His father's good name. And yet his father was still willing and ready to forgive. Dear Christian, how many times have you grieved God? And that in spite of the fact that God has freely given you the greatest treasure anyone could ever receive – true life with God in His heaven, and the forgiveness of sins here in this life for Christ's sake.

Just think for a moment about the worst thing you've ever done. How would you feel if you woke up one morning and discovered that that sin had

been broadcast far and wide so that everyone you knew had found out about it? Well, fortunately, that's not likely to ever happen – unless maybe you decide to run for the office of the President of the United States. But Someone greater than your friends and family already know about that sin – and has been greatly grieved by it. But consider this also. Although God *is* and *has been* grieved your sin, like the father in this story, He still desires your return. He's waiting for you like the Prodigal's father waited for him – desirous of throwing His arms around your neck, killing the fatted calf, rejoicing over your return, and clothing you in the robe of righteousness purchased for you by the blood of His Son. So, do you think God cares? Is He really interested in your life? You bet He is!

God's mercy for sinners is unending – which means His mercy for you is unending, as well. His greatest desire is only that you cast your sins and burdens at His feet so that He can cast them into the sea of forgetfulness – as far as the East is from the West – and remember them no more. And that is precisely what He does. In Baptism He has claimed you as His own. In Confession and Absolution He lavishes upon you even more the gift of His forgiveness. And in the Lord's Supper, the Medicine of Immortality, He gives you His very own Son's body and blood to eat and drink for the forgiveness of your sin and the strengthening of your faith. And all this He gives as a gift so that you might share it with others when they find themselves in the position of the Prodigal, as we all do from time to time.

The Good News here is this text is that in Christ there is no yesterday – only today and tomorrow. You can *only* move ahead from the here and the now. And the more you realize that this salvation Christ earned for us all is freely yours as a gift of pure grace – and not because of *anything* you've done – the less likely you'll be to play the role of the older brother who was jealous of what the father had given to his younger son. And the more you realize this, the more you'll rejoice with the Father over His unending mercy and goodness in Christ Jesus as He lovingly throws His arms around the neck of every penitent sinner who comes into the fold of His Church. How much more, realizing this, will you be able to say with great joy: "Thank God, He hasn't dealt with *me* according to *my* sins." Amen.