

Pastor T.C. Arnold  
3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday after Trinity  
Luke 15:11-32  
June 12<sup>th</sup>, 2016

Thirteen years ago, after my father passed away, our family went through file boxes that hasn't seen the light of day for decades. I found my mother and father's baptismal certificates. I decided to have them framed and I gave them back to her as a gift (by the way, framing your baptismal certificate and placing it in a prominent place helps to remind us that we are one of God's baptized children each day). She loved it. My mother hung the certificates in the front room of her home.

When mother had to be moved to the nursing home, there was no place for the framed certificates. So, now, I have them. They hang on a wall in the parsonage. A few days ago, I happened to look at my dad's old certificate. I noticed that the date of his baptism was June 12<sup>th</sup>, 1932. Exactly 84 years ago today, at St. Matthew Lutheran in Brussels, IL, my father was baptized. Today, I could go into that very church and find that very baptismal font that held the water, combined that day with God's Word that marked my father as THE Father's very own son.

Because this is the time of year that my father was born and the time he passed away, I have been thinking a lot about my father lately. We tend to do that – even more – with those who aren't with us at the moment.

Such is the case for the boy with the dubious title, “prodigal son” in the Gospel text for today. With his Father – in the Father's house – he wanted to be separated from Him. Apart from Him – away from the Father's house – the son wanted to be with his Father.

Really, it isn't too much of a stretch to tell you that I myself was like the prodigal son. No, I didn't want my father's money to go and spend it on wild living – unless of course that means draining his bank account so that I could go to college (if that is the case... well... yes, I guess I did take my father's money and run). But I did so much desire to get out of the house. I wanted to be away from his watchful eye, his constrictive rules, his potential criticisms, his need to parent this young adult unnecessarily.

I now know what that is like from both sides of the coin. Andrea and I have a young adult (still a kid to us) who can't wait to go away to school at the end of this summer. He desires his freedom. He craves his independence, and, in order to go away, he needs his father's money.

But it's not just me, nor Jacob, but each of us who, in one way or the other, is the prodigal son in today's Gospel text. And, I'm not talking about to our earthly fathers – I'm talking about to our Heavenly Father, the same Heavenly Father Jesus illustrates as the father in the parable. We are wasters of God's gifts, squanderers of His blessings and freedom seekers who desire to be apart from and not a part of God's Holy Household.

God calls each of us as stewards of His gifts. That word “Stewardship” means “manager”. Though each good gift is from God Himself, He provides such things for our time and life today. Often we don't even think twice about such blessings in this world because we have always had them and God always gives them, so why even consider such things. Worse yet, we think of ourselves as the providers of all we have making ourselves both steward and lord. And the only one who would promote us to such a rank is ourselves.

Squanderers take advantage of blessings imparted by God and use them unwisely. Like the boy in the story, reckless living was his malady. God blesses each of us with time and talents that are quite frankly to be used for the sake of those the Lord has given us to serve. These blessings are easily squandered recklessly when motivation for self-gratification comes before how God has called you – yes you – to provide service to neighbor as a blessing to them. You see, this is how God imparts blessings. He takes what He has provided you with, and then takes your talents of service, and

provides for the needs of others. I'm not saying that we don't need blessings for ourselves. Yes we do. But each of us also has the vocation of Christian servant. That is carried out from this place – from you homes to you neighbors – for the sake of the service you provide through your vocation – for the sake your coworkers and family members. Each of us are called, not to take our father's precious blessings and gifts to waste them on self – making ourselves lord of all things – but rather to use them for the sake of serving our neighbor and our Lord.

Beloved, repent and be not like the prodigal son. Do not take the blessings of God the Father and squander them on useless things. Take your God-given blessings that the Lord so graciously and without merit in you imparts and bless others, build up His church, provide for those you serve, and by doing so you show the Lord – the Father – what true love looks like. *“Fear, love, and trust in God above all things,”* says Luther in the explanation of the 1<sup>st</sup> Commandment in the catechism.

The prodigal son in the text “came to himself,” it says. This is the initial repentance of the son. He found himself in such a desperate life situation that he took a job that a gentile citizen of the country though there was no way this boy would do. He fed pigs, rendering this good Jewish boy unclean by associating with unclean animals. He was willing to separate himself even further from his people, from his family and from his Lord because he was so desperate. So desperate was he that he wanted to fill his belly with pig food. How personally demoralizing and disgraceful. As far as a good story for Jesus to tell about total separation from family and God, this is the best we hear in Scriptures – with maybe the exception of the story of the rich man and Lazarus that we heard a couple of weeks ago. How is this boy ever going to be reconciled with his father – after all of this? There is no way the father will receive him back as a son.

Wrong! Such is the power, the strength, the unimaginable scope of God's love. Realize, beloved in the Lord, the father ran to his son who was lost and now is found. Realize that before one word is uttered by the son, the father has his arms around his neck showering him with an unconditional reception. Lest we think that our God only sees us as pig feeders – or worse yet (in this situation) – one who desires pig food, take a look at the father in the text who is the Heavenly Father for us today.

Beloved, in our sins we are “pig wallowers” in our desperations and our sins, like the boy. But in God's free gift of grace, we are restored members of the Lord's heavenly household. Today, God's love is poured out around your neck, runs to you while you are yet far off, in the form of a cross, in the gift of true blood, in the compassion of the giving of His only begotten son so that you are restored.

*“Bring the best robe (my son will be clothed in righteousness) bring the ring (a symbol of status), bring shoes (no son of mine will go barefoot) bring the fattened calf, we will eat and celebrate. For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.”* From lost to found is the way God makes us in His grace. Because we deserve it? No! Because He really loves us that much? Yes!

I think of my father, a man who worked for the telephone company for 35 years – a true Christian vocation – he served his neighbor through that work. A man of few words, but of tremendous example as he sat in the pew every Sunday with his family singing hymns terribly off-key. I think of that man, baptized in Christ 84 years ago today in a small Lutheran Church in rural Calhoun County, IL made a child of God – when his Heavenly Father ran to him through water and the Word, gave him an undeserved gift and called my father His son. I think of those today that live that faith – who live in God's work and faith and love. And what better definition of father could we ever create – than the one we see in the parable from Luke chapter 15 today? No better definition. No better work. No better love than our Heavenly Father gives. He gives everything – including His Son – for us – prodigals who have been returned by God's unending grace. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.