

"Life after the Party"

Luke 15:22-32

Laity Sunday

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Relationships . . .

The concept of building and restoring relationships is a major theme of the teachings of Jesus. The 15th Chapter of Luke begins by telling us that "tax collectors and sinners were coming near to listen" to Jesus' teachings and the Pharisees and scribes were grumbling saying "This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them. In Jesus' time, the Pharisees felt strict obedience to the law was the only way to please God. Those who were "unclean" physically, spiritually or politically were to be avoided, at all cost, for fear of contaminating one's efforts at gaining spiritual purity. ." In the parables of the Lost Sheep, the Lost Coin and the Prodigal Son, we find Jesus' response.

Notice how skillfully, Jesus weaves these three parables together. First, the lost sheep is part of the herd. It is defenseless on its own. It is totally dependent upon its shepherd, part of the lower class. The shepherd is so caring that he leaves the rest of his flock and searches until the lost sheep (10% of the herd's value) is rescued. Where upon scripture states the shepherd calls his friends and neighbors together and has a party to celebrate finding "what was lost". Jesus uses the party theme to announce to his listeners that "there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine persons *who need no repentance.*"

The parable of the lost coin is mentioned next. Now this is something of worth. A drachma, the equivalent to a full day's wages and ten percent of a woman's entire coin collection, is lost . This woman, also a person who lacks social status, does everything in her power to "find what was lost". Again there is a party and much rejoicing. Jesus says, "there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents."

Now Jesus ups the ante with this marvelous Parable of the Lost Son. Jesus has moved from property, to currency, to the most valuable possession in Jewish society you could lose; a son. You know this story. You have heard it read, but let's

look at what this parable said to those who were the experts of Jewish law; the Pharisees. Let's try to understand with the Pharisees why Jesus would welcome and build *relationships* with known sinners and corrupt agents of the hated Roman Empire over the known "good people" of his day.

Upon hearing this parable, the Pharisee would have judged the family in the parable to be terribly dysfunctional. The most important blessing a man could have in Jewish society was a son and yet there was something terribly wrong in the *relationships* between the sons and with their father. For all the love the Father had bestowed upon them, both sons just did not get it. There are obviously some deep seated animosities and emotional baggage that have developed over the years between these two brothers. As Jesus told this parable, the Pharisees would have recognized that both brothers had great deal of disrespect for their father.

One Jewish scholar has said, "According to the Jewish law of inheritance, if there were but two sons, the elder would receive two portions, (Deut. 21:17), the younger would receive a third of all movable property. A man might, during his lifetime, dispose of all his property, by **gift**, as he chose. The younger son thus was entitled by law to his share, though he had no right to claim it during his father's lifetime. The request must be regarded as asking a favor (Edersheim)."

In Jewish culture, a father was expected to have complete control over his property during his lifetime. Dividing the father's property before his death was permissible, although thought of as particularly disrespectful. For this reason, to the hearers of the parable, the request of the prodigal son would have been seen as extremely offensive, and the father's willingness to comply would be deemed generous beyond all expectations.

Another Christian thinker says, "But the prodigal son went even further. Not only did he ask for his inheritance, which was bad enough, but he did something that was utterly unthinkable and downright illegal. He sold his inheritance... The Mishnah, which was probably developing in the time of Jesus, gives this rule: "If one assigned in writing his estate to his son to become his after his death, the father cannot sell it since it is conveyed to his son, and the son cannot sell it because it is under the father's control" (*Baba Bathra* viii.7). Even if a father decided to divide up his property among his

heirs, neither the father nor the heirs could dispose of the property while the father was still alive." -**Jirair Tashjian**, Copyright © , Jirair Tashjian

In essence the younger son, when he asked for his share of the inheritance was saying to his father, "I wish you were dead!" In this situation, it was expected that the elder son would assert himself and help the father "save face". This was not mentioned and the Pharisees must have shook their heads and pulled their beards in disappointment over the behavior of both of the sons.

In Deuteronomy 21:18, the law provided for just such a situation as the Prodigal son. The Pharisees knew this law well. Upon the return of the Prodigal, the son should have been brought before the elders and the father and mother were required to state, "This son of ours is stubborn and rebellious. He will not obey us. He is a glutton and a drunkard. Then all the men of the town shall stone him to death." This was the law, but it did not happen and the Pharisees must have been wondering why.

Since in this parable, the father is clearly meant to be God, both sons committed what Wesley called, "the root of all sin . . . independency from God, the Father." (*Notes*,15:12) Jesus confronts the Pharisees with another party. It is a celebration of redemption. The young man's status, as an heir, is restored by the father's statement, "for this son of mine was dead and has returned to life. He was lost, but now he is found. So the party began." Luke 15:24 (NLT)

So think with me of the life this family faces "after the party", after the fatted calf, after the robe, after the ring of inheritance after the father begged the elder brother to join in the celebration.

1. The family business has lost 33% of its net worth.
2. The "lost" son has been redeemed and has regained his status as heir to what is left of the estate.
3. The elder son now owns what is left of the estate, but the father controls the estate and none of the property can be sold while the father is alive.

BODY: The law and the Pharisees had no answer on how to help alleviate this family's problem, but Jesus' Gospel did. This family must begin anew and work at restoring its *relationships* in order to heal itself. I would like to propose three things that Jesus taught that would help this family.

1. First, the two brothers must **forgive themselves** as Jesus states in the Lord's Prayer. (Matthew 6:12 NLT)
 - a. If building and restoring relationships is a major theme of Jesus' teachings, then forgiveness of one's self is an essential first step.
 - b. Forgiving oneself is essential to getting rid of emotional baggage that has accumulated over the years that blocks restoring relationships.
 - c. Forgiving oneself is essential for accepting forgiveness from others.
 - d. The Prodigal must forgive himself of his lifestyle of self indulgence, disrespect toward his family and trying to live independent from his father's will.
 - e. The Elder Son must forgive himself of his feelings of superiority, resentment, envy and judgmental attitude toward both his father and younger brother.
2. Secondly, the two brothers must **be reconciled to each other and to their father**. Reconciliation means to put in balance a relationship.
 - a. On a daily basis, each brother must recognize that they are loved extravagantly by their father just because they are his sons. This love gives each brother status and a reason for not returning to the days of sibling rivalry. Harmony must be restored. Both brothers are responsible for accomplishing this task.
 - b. In Jewish times, part of the concept of reconciliation involved restitution or figuring out a fair and equitable way of restoring the estate. Notice the father would have none of this. We do not work off God's Grace, **but** on the other hand, God's Grace is not cheap, either. Listen to what Paul says in the 5th Chapter of 2 Corinthians. "So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old is passed away; see everything has become new! All this is from God who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the *ministry of reconciliation*; that is, in Christ, God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting the trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us: we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God."
 - c. Because God forgives us, we are empowered and free to forgive our "family members".
 - d. Unlike *Love Story's* famous quote, Christian love means constantly saying we are sorry, both to God and to our neighbor.
3. Thirdly, the brothers must recognize the sacredness of the family.

- a. Since, in this Parable, God is the Father, the **Church**, or the "Fellowship of Believers", is His true family. That means that this parable family is part of our family trees and we are all brothers and sisters in Christ.
- b. In Matthew 28:19-20, Jesus states, "Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." This is the charter of the Church.
- c. Gaining spiritual strength and maturity can only be realized within a Christian community with corporate worship that emphasizes personal spiritual discipline.

CLOSURE:

By the end of the story of the Parable of the Lost Son, we realize that Jesus is saying it is no longer acceptable just to "be a good person" who abides by the law and secretly harbors envy and resentment. If we are "in Christ", our life cannot lack a love for the least, the last and the lost, even if that means building *relationships* with the marginalized and "unacceptable" of our modern society .

You see, we can't spread the Gospel, as ambassadors of Christ, without first building or restoring *relationships* with people in need of God. This parable is a clear call to the *ministry of reconciliation* and this call is not given just to the ordained clergy. Matthew 28 is given to all of us, laity and clergy, to fulfill.

Well, the party is over. The feast is finished. Your inheritance has been restored. You are a child of God. Brothers and sisters, whether you realize it or not, you have been forgiven. Is your soul troubled or are you at peace? Do you have a joy that God has personally found you? What is your response to "returning" to your Father?

1. Have you forgiven yourself?
2. Have you reconciled yourself to your fellow brothers and sisters?
3. Have you come to really comprehend the sacredness of your Christian family . . . the Church?

God wants us to be a joyous and loving people. I believe he loves parties; especially when the "lost have been found". God really asks only two things from us. We are to love God and love all our brothers and sisters. There are no exceptions to these commandments. As human beings, we are incapable of loving in either direction without first building *relationships*.

In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Resources:

<http://www.crivoice.org/inheritance.html> Tahsjian, Jirair, The Inheritance Practices in the First Century Era. 2009.

<http://www.ccel.org/wesley/notes> John Wesley's Notes on the Whole Bible. The New Testament. Read Online Free. Notes on the Gospel of Luke XV. Christian Classics Ethereal Library.

Edersheim, Alfred. The life and Times of Jesus the Messiah. Volume 2. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1973.

Note: Please know that this is not a word for word manuscript of the preaching event. This is background material and primary thoughts that may or may not have been used in the actual sermon delivery.