

## ***“The Father’s Son”***

The Parable of the Prodigal Son is fairly familiar to most of you – but let me ask you – what is it about?

Is it about being “lost”? Yes, that’s why it comes on the heels of the Parables of the Lost Sheep and the Lost Coin (which are not included in our text today). But at its heart, this is about the First Commandment.

“You shall have no other gods.” “We should fear, love, and trust in God above all things.” Or, to say it another way – who is the God of your life? Who gets to have the final say? Who gets to say “how it is”?

The Parable of the Prodigal Son is about you and your life – how you live as a child of God, and what it means to live in His kingdom. As you listen to Jesus this morning, you will hear about the God who tells you “how it is” – so that you may celebrate and rejoice.

To properly understand what Jesus is saying, it is important to see why He tells us this story in the first place. St. Luke writes: “Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear [Jesus]. And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, ‘This man receives sinners and eats with them.’ So He told them this parable ...”

These religious leaders are grumbling because God receives and eats with sinners. “That’s not how it should be!” they are thinking. Jesus is “guilty by association” with these sinners! Did you hear what they are saying? God is guilty.

In this parable there is a father with two sons. The younger son – rather than waiting for his father to die – wants his inheritance now. And the father gives it to him. “He divided his property between” both of his sons.

The younger son wants to be independent – which is ironic, since he lives from what the father has given to him. He wants to be the god of his own life – to say how it is – how he lives, how he spends his money, and so forth.

Living apart from the father – he’s reckless, he spends everything in lavish living. That’s what “prodigal” means – reckless, or lavish. And being the god of his own life – where does that get him? “In need.” All of the father’s stuff is gone, and now he has to rely on himself.

This son ends up in the fields with the pigs – hungry, “longing to be fed with the pods the pigs ate.” Now remember, who is Jesus telling this parable to? That’s right, the Pharisees and the scribes. And what would they say about this prodigal son?

Well, since God says in the Old Testament that pigs were an unclean animal – and that eating, or touching, or working with them made you ceremonially unclean – and therefore, unable to come into the Temple, unable to live in fellowship with God – they would say that the prodigal son is cut off from God.

He’s “guilty by association” with the pigs – just like the “tax collectors and sinners” that Jesus is hanging out with. And that’s the point. Jesus is addressing their grumbling about God. He is talking to them ..... and to you! Are you listening?

Finally, the prodigal son realizes “how it is” when he is the god of his own life – he realizes that life was better in his father’s house. He’s starving to death – while his father’s servants “have more than enough to eat.”

But there’s a problem. He’s been reckless, wasted everything the father has given him. How can he go back to his father’s house? He realizes he’s not worthy to return – that he’s not worthy to be “called your son” – not even worthy to be a hired servant.

But he goes anyway. I’ll confess my sin – and hopefully, my father will be gracious enough to give me what I don’t deserve. I’ll ask to be treated as one of his hired servants. Hopefully he will listen to me so I can live.

And so he goes with his carefully concocted plan – but the father, who’s been waiting for this day – hearing his son’s confession, cuts him off before he gets to the part about being a hired servant.

You don’t get to call the shots – to say “how it is.” Bring the best robe, a ring and shoes, kill the fattened calf – lets eat and celebrate. “For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.”

When the older son hears how the father has treated the prodigal – he’s angry! He doesn’t want to have anything to do with his brother, or his father! He refuses to call him “my brother” – refers to him as “your son.” He won’t even go into the house.

So, the father comes out to him – to tell him “how it is.” The father hasn’t cheated him out of anything. He has given the older son his inheritance as well. “Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. It is fitting to celebrate and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found.”

Are you the younger son? Do you live as if you were the god of your own life – and go off and leave the Father behind? Have you wasted all that the Father has given you in reckless living? Do you try to call the shots – tell God how He should treat you?

Are you the older son? Do you grumble about sinners, thinking that you are better than them – that you deserve good things from God – that He should hang out with you? Do you become angry with God when He loves those who do not deserve His love? Do you refuse to be a brother to sinners? Do you refuse to go in and celebrate?

Are you “lost”? A sinner, who deserves nothing from God – who should forever be unclean and cut off from God?

Jesus is talking to YOU, telling you “how it is.” God the Father eagerly waits for your return so He can wrap His loving arms around you. He kisses you – and confessing your sin, He tells you “how it is.” I forgive you. Come, let us celebrate – for my son was dead, and is alive; was lost, and is found.”

Thanks be to God that we have such a gracious Father who gives us NOT what our sin deserves – but what His LOVE desires. Thanks be to God for our inheritance – “all that is mine is yours” the Father says – my grace, my kingdom, my truth about “how it is” – all is yours, my son.

Come, receive the feast He has prepared for YOU. Rejoice with me – rejoice to be the Father’s son – to live under Him in His kingdom – to live under, and by, and with, and in His reckless grace – which is “for you” in Christ Jesus. Amen.

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