

Sermon  
Lent 4-C  
St. Andrew's, Methuen  
March 27, 2022  
William Bradbury

Joshua 5:9-12  
Psalm 32  
2 Corinthians 5:16-21  
Luke 15:1-3, 11b-32

"There was a man who had two sons."

Through the centuries we've disregarded this opening line by naming the parable after only one son, the Prodigal Son. As if the older brother and the father only play supporting roles.

But I believe Jesus wants us to put our main attention on this man—who had two sons.

You all know the story:

The younger son demands his inheritance, goes to Vegas and spends it all on booze, broads, and betting—and loses at every turn. He's now on the bottom rung of life, feeding the unclean pigs.

The elder son stays with his father and has an abundance of money, comfort, and friends, and claims he has never disobeyed a command of his Father.

Two very different journeys—on the outside. But I want to suggest that on the inside they are on the same journey, living inside the same story, **BECAUSE NEITHER ONE UNDERSTANDS WHO THEIR FATHER REALLY IS FOR THEM, NEITHER IS ABLE TO UNDERSTAND THE DEEPEST TRUTH OF WHO THEY ARE—THAT THEY ARE SONS OF THE LOVING FATHER.**

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Both young men have the presence, wealth, and affection of the Father throughout their lives, from beginning to end. **But neither believes it and therefore, neither lives as if it is true.**

**The younger son views his relationship with his father as transactional:** he believes he has served his time on the farm, so now he can finally do his own thing by having transactional relationships with sex workers.

**The elder son** lives with a smoldering resentment toward his father. He believes he has worked like a slave who can't even have goat to share with his friends.

**Both sons are living in an illusory world of separation and scarcity—a prison of their own making—created by their false and negative thinking.** In their minds they are not sons who share in the affection and abundance of their father.

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**But then the younger son through the grace of suffering has an awakening—he comes to himself—and has a true thought: I have a rich father!**

**“How many of my father's hired hands have bread enough and to spare, but here I am dying of hunger! I will get up and go to my father....”**

He rehearses a confession, but long before he can give it, his Father is running towards him with his arms out in welcome and celebration. This happens **before** the confession is uttered. **It is important for the son to say it, but it is not necessary for the father to hear it to love his son,** because this son of his was dead, and is alive, was lost and is found”.

The Father reveals the son's true nature by giving the best robe, a ring, and shoes to this **one who can never lose his status as a beloved son.**

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 The older brother also experiences the grace of suffering when he hears the music and smells smoke from the grill, but he doesn't come to himself but instead withdraws further away from his father, saying, **“Ah-Ha! I knew it! He's always loved that failure more than me!”**

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 But just as the father goes out in love to the younger son, so now he goes out in love to the elder son and reminds him, **'Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours.'**

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 Jesus enters this world that we've generated by the belief that separation and scarcity are facts as solid as a granite countertop. This world in which God **is too far away, physically and emotionally; and all that God has is not ours, so that we live in fear and fight for everything.**

Some of us strike out to prove we don't need anybody and can do whatever we want.

Others of us stay inside the conventional nightmare, known as the American dream, stockpiling money, comfort, and sometimes religion, or guns, or both, to protect ourselves in this "red in tooth and claw" world.

**Both responses create the same lonely, fearful existence.**

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 Jesus leaves it to us to write the rest of the story, by deciding which group of people we want to spend our lives with:

Do we want to live as the Pharisees and the scribes who were grumbling, "This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them."

Or do we want to live with those who "began to be joyful and celebrate" because we were dead and are now alive, we were lost and are found.

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 So, here's a practice that may help:

Jesus taught us that when we pray, we are to say, **"Our Father"**.  
 And when we say those words, "Our Father" who do you imagine that father to be:

Do we imagine "Our Father", is like our earthly father?

Or some idealized, abstract image of "Father"?

Or do we see "Our Father" sitting on a throne high and lifted up, stern and terrible to behold, like the one sitting on the throne in the stained glass above many altars, including ours?

In this parable of the man who had two sons Jesus invites us to a different image, the image of "Our Father" running to embrace his dead and lost children.

"Our Father" who has tears of joy as he wraps his arms around us and calls for the robe, ring, and shoes to be brought for you, his child.

"Our Father" also comes out to us when we've turned away from the celebration and tells us, "Son, daughter, **you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours.**"

**+you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours.**

**+you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours.**

This is "Our Father". Don't pray the rest of the prayer until you know and feel the love and the joy revealed to us by Christ.

