

“FATHERHOOD OF GOD”
Luke 15:11–32
June 17, 2018
Holiday Island Presbyterian Church

¹¹ Jesus continued: “There was a man who had two sons. ¹² The younger one said to his father, ‘Father, give me my share of the estate.’ So he divided his property between them.

¹³ “Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living. ¹⁴ After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. ¹⁵ So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. ¹⁶ He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything.

¹⁷ “When he came to his senses, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired servants have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! ¹⁸ I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. ¹⁹ I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired servants.’ ²⁰ So he got up and went to his father.

“But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.

²¹ “The son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’

²² “But the father said to his servants, ‘Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. ²³ Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let’s have a feast and celebrate. ²⁴ For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’ So they began to celebrate.

²⁵ “Meanwhile, the older son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. ²⁶ So he called one of the servants and asked him what was going on. ²⁷ ‘Your brother has come,’ he replied, ‘and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.’

²⁸ “The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him. ²⁹ But he answered his father, ‘Look! All these years I’ve been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my

friends. ³⁰ But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!

³¹ “My son,” the father said, “you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. ³² But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.”

INTRODUCTION:

**Down through the years,
this parable has been known as
the “Parable of the Prodigal Son.”
Sometimes translated as the “Lost Son.”**

**Often when it is preached,
it is the “Lost Son” who takes center stage
and the “Obedient Son” who plays a supporting role.**

**Today, we celebrate Father’s Day –
- so today, we’re going to concentrate on the father
in this parable.**

**To quickly summarize the parable,
A son asks for and receives his inheritance,
heads out for greener pastures,
squanders his inheritance,
becomes destitute,
and returns home.**

The father is very forgiving and welcomes the son home.

**The brother is jealous of the returning son
thinking that he should be treated better than the brother
since he remained home and faithful to the father.**

FATHER AS METAPHOR FOR GOD:

**As we read and contemplate this parable,
it becomes clear that Jesus was referring to God
as the father of the parable.**

**Jesus was hoping that by looking closely at the father
we would more clearly see the character of God.**

That part is obvious.

**What is *not* so obvious
is the *full* character of God revealed in the parable
because we skip past the father
in order to identify with the son.**

GENEROSITY OF GOD:

**The first thing to note
is the *generosity* of the father.**

**The son makes a request
and the father grants that request.**

**A good father – especially God the omnipotent One –
knows what will be the most likely outcome
in granting our requests.**

**The Father – being wise and knowing his son,
knows the son will mismanage his inheritance.
And that is *exactly* what happens.**

**Perhaps the son had shown some irresponsibility in the past,
perhaps the son had a tendency to be rebellious,
maybe the son talked a lot about big city life.**

**However, the father recognizes the son's free will;
just as God recognizes *our* free will.**

**Therefore, the father allows the son to make mistakes –
- mistakes that have consequences.**

The father could have denied the request.

**The son would have resented the father
and nothing would have been learned.**

God is like that –

**- God allows us to make decisions which will lead to disaster
knowing that we will learn more from failure
than from lecture.**

I ran across a recent quote by Mark Twain I really like:

**“Good decisions come from experience.
Experience comes from making bad decisions.”**

Because of our free will

we will make bad decisions.

God sent Jonah to Nineveh,

but Jonah rebelled and headed the other way.

That didn't work out so well for Jonah . . .

. . . but God did not abandon him.

**The Israelites decided God was not working fast enough
to deliver them from the wilderness**

so they made a golden idol.

That didn't work out well, either.

But God remained faithful to them.

Sometimes – in my case, too often –

we make some really bad decisions which end up badly.

**They say the last words a Texan usually says is:
“Hey, ya’ll watch this.”**

**Because of the loving generosity of God,
the bad decisions we make don’t cut us off
from the love of God.**

**Oh, we will most likely have to face the consequences
of the bad decisions we make;
but by repenting and asking for forgiveness
we can be restored to full fellowship with God.**

**So, without a lecture on financial responsibility,
without implied threats,
without setting barriers to deter the son,
the father allows the son to wander.**

THE PATIENCE OF GOD:

**The second characteristic is perhaps my favorite:
the *patience* of the father.**

**The father does *not* pursue the son.
Let me repeat that because it is *very* important!
The father does *not* pursue the son.**

**Even though the father knows the probable outcome
of the son’s decision to leave home
and pursue pleasures of the flesh,
the father does NOT pursue the son.**

Think about that for a moment.

The father waits patiently for the son to come to his senses.

**Is the father worried?
What father would not be!**

**But the worry and anxiety of the father
is not reason enough to pursue the son.**

**That thought is just the reverse of the parable
of the lost coin
in which the woman searched for what was lost
until it was found!**

How can that be?

**If God does not pursue us to prevent us from making bad decisions,
how do you explain the woman searching for the lost coin?**

Sherlock Holmes said:

**“When you eliminate the impossible, whatever remains – no
matter how improbable – is the truth.”**

**While it is *possible* for the son to make bad decisions,
the *coin* is lost through no fault of its own.**

**God will pursue the lost – those who have not had an opportunity
to be in fellowship with God.**

**And God calls us to reach out to the lost –
- those whom God is calling but have not responded.**

**However, those who *willingly* separate themselves from God –
- through acts of sin and rebellion –
God does *not* pursue.**

**We are to be like the father
and welcome those who have strayed
back into fellowship with us.**

**But, to my knowledge, there is no mandate to pursue them!
Like the Father, God waits for the Prodigal Son
to come to his senses and return home.**

**GOD AND THE OLDER BROTHER:
Then there's the older brother . . .**

**He remained at home,
an obedient and faithful son,
enduring all the hardships of an aging father
and what is his reward?**

A pat on the back and a job well done.

**Over the years,
I've heard a lot of arguments for "death-bed confessions"
and last-minute conversions.**

**Too many times I have heard folks say:
How can someone who lived a life of sin and debauchery
repent at the last moment of their life
and receive the rewards of heaven.**

**Well, first of all, God makes the rules.
And since God is just, the rules must also be just.
Just because we don't like the rules
or understand the rules
doesn't negate the rules.**

**There should be joy in knowing that we spent most of our life
in a good relationship with God.**

**The older brother who stayed home
knew every day that his father was proud of him.**

He could see it in his father's eyes; hear it in his voice.

**When his head hit the pillow at night,
he knew he had pleased his father.**

The prodigal never knew that peace and tranquility.

**Whenever he thought about home and his father,
he *knew* he was disappointing his father.
He robbed himself of peace of mind –
- trading it for a load of guilt.**

**The older brother just didn't see the pain and guilt
lodged in his brother's heart.
Trust me, it was there.**

What the older brother saw was – in his mind – an injustice.

**What the father saw, was an answer to his prayers;
his son come home.**

**What the lost son experienced,
was the limitless love and forgiveness of his father.**

CONCLUSION:

**So, what does that mean to those of us who are fathers –
- those with biological children
- those with adopted children
- those who serve as father figures to others**

**First, it reminds us that our children will at times be rebellious.
There is a bit of the prodigal in all of us;
just as there is a bit of the faithful son.**

Oh, our sons and daughters may not be as overtly rebellious

as the Prodigal Son,
but they can – do – and will rebel from time to time.

Sometimes the best we can do is simply wait . . .
. . . let the consequences play themselves out
. . . let our children drink deep at the well of regret
and then welcome them home
when they come to their senses.

“I told you so” rarely does anything more
than drive a wedge deeper into the relationship.

That’s the time to be thankful for the return of the child.

And for those who are quietly faithful;
who seem to always be there,
who rarely cause us any problems or concerns . . .
. . . thank God for them . . .
. . . and thank *them* often!

And then, we turn our attention to us.

Because our fathers were all too human,
too heavy-handed a times,
too busy with their own lives to share their time with us,
or simply not there . . .
. . . we need to forgive them . . .
. . . and move on.

Dwelling on the past is never fruitful.

In my youth, folks in East Texas
were still plowing fields with mules.

**My dad had about a half a block of land behind his hospital
that he loaned to a man named Mr. Schwartz
who used a mule to plow that field and raise corn.**

One day, my dad took me out to that field and said:

“You see those rows, son?

**See how every now and again there is a zig to the right
or a zag to the left?**

**“That’s where Mr. Schwartz looked back
to see how he was doing.”**

“You can’t plow a straight row if you’re looking back.”

One final word . . .

. . . at the beginning of this sermon

I said we were going to concentrate on the Father.

WE are the sons and daughters of God, the Father of us all.

There is no way we can know the extent of God’s love for us.

**We can intellectually know it is unwavering,
boundless and never-failing.**

No matter how far we have strayed,

how far we have traveled into the “far country”

of sin and debauchery,

how much of our life we have wasted . . .

God is waiting to welcome us home!

And like the Father of all fathers . . .

. . . God will welcome us with open arms

and never look back at our past!

PRAYER:

Grace-giving and All-Loving God, we thank You for Your boundless love for us. Hold us close, forgive us, welcome us home. And help us share the love You have shared with us. AMEN