

**FOURTH SUNDAY IN LENT
MARCH 6, 2016**

"ROOM IN MY HEART"

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Our Lenten journey for this year has been all about "Opening The Treasures Of Lent." We may not think of Lent as a time of GREAT TREASURE. After all, the color is purple and somewhat subdued; the crosses are draped in black, a sign of sorrow and mourning; there are no bright colored flowers on the altar, in fact no flowers at all; and we do not hear the word "alleluia" anywhere in our worship. Other than when the Pastor uses the word in a sermon, but then, it's just to make a point! Lent has always been a time of repentance, and as the bulletin says, "austerity, purification and spiritual cleansing." So where do we come off looking for TREASURE?

The point is that in our Baptismal Covenant we are given direction as to where our greatest treasures are found. I hope these words sound familiar: *"to live among God's faithful people, to hear the word of God and share in the Lord's Supper, to proclaim the good news of God in Christ through word and deed, to serve all people, following the example of Jesus, and to strive for justice and peace in all the earth."* And we will find these TREASURES only as we OPEN our eyes, our hands, our ears, our hearts and our lives, to the Lord Jesus Christ.

So today, our LENTEN JOURNEY continues, as we find more treasures open to us. Our prayer for today is: OPEN MY HEART, LORD.

ROOM IN MY HEART... BEGINS AT HOME!

It all comes together in the parable that Jesus tells in our Gospel. It has been called "The Parable Of The Prodigal Son." The word "*PRODIGAL*" means "extravagant" or "wasteful." And while that can be either GOOD or BAD it focuses on just one small part of this story. The younger son is taking off to find greener pastures and to have the time of his life! We would do far better to rename this parable "*MY HEART AT HOME.*" MY HEART AT HOME, for the younger son. MY HEART AT HOME, for the older son. MY HEART AT HOME, for the father. HOME IS WHERE THE HEART IS! But the question is where did each of the characters in this story really find HOME?

Let's take this story one step beyond Jesus' telling. Imagine how this story might be filmed in a sequel. Imagine that it is, "*THE MORNING AFTER THE NIGHT BEFORE.*"

The party lasted well into the next day. After all, as Dad said, *"...we had to celebrate and rejoice... this brother was dead and has come to life... he was lost and has been found."* There was music and dancing, food and drink, tears of joy and tears of disbelief. And this morning, at the breakfast table, the family is together at HOME! OH REALLY!?!? There sits the returned son with egg on his face! There sits the son who stayed, the grump with a grievance! There sits the father who is trying to love them both! Can we picture the scene? WOULD WE WANT TO BE THERE?

Imagine the conversation! If the feelings and emotions of this dis-jointed family are the same this morning as they were last night, then this family together, is light-years apart. And this house is anything but a home with a heart!

On the one hand, there is a son who has returned home. This son wasn't kidnapped or lost at sea. He wasn't a soldier missing in action, or a businessman abducted by terrorists. He cut and run on his own! He demanded his share of the family fortune, and then took off to have a high old time of "wine, women and song." Responsibility and duty were the farthest thing from his mind. He was going to PAR-TEEEE!

He came to his senses when the money ran out. The stock market crashed! His American Express card was denied! His pockets were empty! The vacation was over! But he could not go home! He remembers how he left. Demanding his right to have what was his! A cartoon in the New Yorker Magazine shows a father looking at his boy and saying, *"Son, this is the third fatted calf we've killed for you. When are you going to settle down?"* He returned home. BUT IS HIS HEART OPEN?

On the other hand, there is the son who stayed home. He feels somewhat rejected. But he never even left home. He didn't go to last night's party. He didn't even say "HELLO" to his younger brother. We don't even know if they have spoken a word, before sitting down for this morning's breakfast. Every red-blooded American knows how this guy feels. He deserves to be at this breakfast table, because he has earned it! He's been faithful! He's been loyal! And the thoughts flying around in his head this morning are: *"Why all this commotion for this good-for-nothing brat? After all I was the one who stayed here to do the dirty work! I put in the long hours! I picked up the slack for the brat who left! Is Dad deaf, dumb and blind? Can't he see how he is being used? How can he be so forgiving? And how dare he give this son, what rightly belongs to me?"* The older brother is the perfect picture of the true American work ethic: work hard, work long, and get what you deserve. He never left home. BUT IS HIS HEART OPEN?

And then we've got DAD! What was he thinking? What kind of parenting is this? He was watching! He was waiting! He was hoping and praying! He has one eye down the road! He is and has never stopped loving! This is his home! BUT IS HIS HEART OPEN?

And this morning, the day after the night before, these three sit down to share a meal together. You get the feeling there should be one more person here, a REFEREE! But there will be no need for outside help. This picture will be held together, by nothing but GRACE! That's right GRACE, UNDESERVED LOVE! And hearts that are open to grace!

HOME IS WHERE THE HEART IS OPEN! The story of this Broken Family is about God's grace. Whether we feel like the child who has just come home, or the child who stayed home, or the father who is trying to hold home together. God says in the words of St. Paul: *"See, everything has become new!"* The house is made of brick and stone, the home is made of love alone!

HOME IS WHERE THE HEART IS OPEN, EVEN WHEN WE DON'T DESERVE IT!

For God loves each one of us, as if He had only one of us to love.

HOME IS WHERE THE HEART IS OPEN, EVEN WHEN WE THINK WE DESERVE IT MORE THAN SOMEONE ELSE!

For God loves each one of us, as if He had only one of us to love.

HOME IS WHERE THE HEART IS OPEN, EVEN WHEN WE ARE ANXIOUS AND WORRIED AND WAITING AND WATCHING!

For God loves each one of us, as if He had only one of us to love.

Our Lenten journey, on the way to great treasure, begins where the heart is open, on the road that takes us home. Saved by grace through faith...

And we pray: OPEN MY HEART, LORD.

And all God's children say,

Amen.

Sola Deo Gloria!