

Living Lent + As People of the Resurrection
Wednesday, March 2, 2016

Midweek Lent 4 + Proclaim
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Charles Dickens said, *"It is the greatest story ever told!"* While we know Dickens was one of the greatest storytellers, he is not talking about one of his stories. He is talking about the Parable of the Prodigal Son. This story has inspired great works of literature, classic movies, and pieces of art. It has been studied, dramatized, preached on and discussed. If we could put the Gospel of Jesus in a nutshell, we would tell the story of The Prodigal Son. It is timeless and timely.

Over the course of the next three weeks, we will look at this parable, and find the meaning for our lives. It is important to begin, by understanding that Jesus tells this story to help us look into the mirror of our own lives, and to help us identify with each one of the characters. And to help us remember the grace that Jesus brings to our world and to our lives.

The title of the parable "Prodigal Son" needs definition in the first place. The word, "PRODIGAL" according to Webster can mean either "exceedingly wasteful" or "extremely generous." So the story could be called "The Prodigal SONS" or "The Prodigal FATHER" or "The Prodigal GOD." There are almost as many interpretations as there are interpreters. And there have been and will continue to be good reason to see how this story presents God's Word as alive and timeless! But over and above everything else, we need to find ourselves in this story. And when we discover our character, we will once again be reminded of a God who welcomes, forgives, laughs and cries.

For today, let's focus on the story using the YOUNGER SON as our main character.

When a child is wayward and lost to the family, emotions run deep. This home-leaving of the younger son is not about a free-spirited boy wanting to live the high-life. Asking for his inheritance is a blatant statement of contempt toward his father and rejection of his home and community. The younger son is saying that his father might as well be dead. We have every reason to believe that the younger son has chosen to leave and be gone forever. Not only is the younger son lost, but the whole family system is disrupted. A lost child changes everyone and everything.

One of life's greatest ironies is that we rarely appreciate what we have, until it is gone. This is most often true in relationships. Our regrets are often about the things, the words, the opportunities left undone. When the younger son leaves home, he is rejecting the relationships he has at home, as if we were rejecting the relationship we have with God.

Knowing that sin separates us from God, the greatest tragedy of sin is when we ignore the fact that God also forgives sins. The unforgiveable sin is to think we don't need forgiving. Recognizing sin as separation from God, the greatest tragedy of sin is when we run from the love of God, looking for forgiveness in all the wrong places.

The younger son is searching for something in his life. What is it? It has to be more than a sense of adventure of "finding himself" or gaining his independence!

Henri Nouwen says it best in his book *"Return of the Prodigal Son."* He writes: *"Leaving home is, then, much more than a historical event bound to time and place. It is a denial of the spiritual reality that I belong to God with every part of my being, that God holds me safe in an eternal embrace, that I am indeed carved in the palms of God's hands and hidden in their shadows. Leaving home means ignoring the truth that God has 'fashioned me in secret, molded me in the depths of the earth and knitted me together in my mother's womb.' Leaving home is living as though I do not yet have a home and must look far and wide to find one."*

What this parable says, is that not even God is defeated by OUR rejection! God, in the person of our loving father, is right here offering forgiveness, compassion and joy in welcoming us home, again and again.

When the younger son finally comes to his senses, he finds himself empty, humiliated and desperate. All dignity is lost as he dines with the swine. But as the younger son asserts his independence from his spiritual home, God proclaims a homecoming.

The loving father runs out to meet his son, announcing a welcome of epic proportions. No finger-pointing, no harsh words, no falling at his father's feet! Nothing but pure grace! Nothing but unconditional love! Nothing but radical hospitality! Nothing but a happy homecoming!

What this great story proclaims, is that God is bigger than all human religious systems, and denominations, and theological rules and regulations. This is an earthly story with the greatest of all heavenly meanings: *GOD SHOWS MERCY EVEN TO THOSE WHO DO NOT DESERVE IT. GOD'S GRACE, HIS UNDERSERVED LOVE, IS FOR YOU AND FOR ME!* We ARE saved by grace through faith to share God's love.

Why?

Because God is always looking for the lost, so that He can proclaim them to be found.

Let us live this Lent as found people, pondering our purpose, proclaiming our place in God's family, and heading straight for the Resurrection.

And all God's children say,

Amen.
Solo Deo Gloria!