

Luke 15:11-24
The Foolishness of the Father's Love
WRCoB 6.19.22

A young man gained admission into VCU.

His father had given him an allowance for the first semester
Which the son had immediately squandered.

Unknowingly to the son, the father lost his job.

Not wanting to appear like the Prodigal Son
He refused to call and ask for more money.

Instead, after advice from friends
He decided to send his father a brief text message

*Father, money required, classes started
Situation critical, suicide imminent.*

The father responded.

*Son, money unavailable, classes suspended
Situation more critical, suicide approved.*

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Today, we look to the story of the Prodigal Son
As a lesson for Father's Day.

This parable offers unparalleled perspectives
Giving incredible insights into human nature
And the nature of God's love.

The story is only found in the Gospel of Luke.

But it is so profound in its description of love
That it is one of Jesus' most beloved of all parables.

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The late, great, Rev. Craddock
Preached a marvelous sermon on this parable.

And in his own delightful way
He offers another perspective on this timeless story
That of a neighbor.

He begins by making the comment that
People celebrate all kinds of things
That are not worth celebrating

Like the woman who calls up and says

*You know I've been on a diet for 2 years.
I lost 5 pounds.*

*I've made a chocolate fudge cake and bought ice cream.
I thought I'd have a few friends over to celebrate.*

Nope, not a good idea.

Or you get a call from a friend saying

*Our plumbing has been backed up for four days.
Roto Rooter got it unclogged everything flushes now
We're throwing a party to celebrate.*

I mean, there are times you just can't see the reason for it.

Like the cause for celebration in today's parable.

Many of us know the story.

This son heads off with his share of the inheritance.

He blows it on fast and furious living
Until every last penny is gone.

With nothing left
And without any shame whatsoever
He goes back home.

If you look closely, the parable doesn't indicate
That he is sorry for what he has done.

Only that he decides to go back home.

As Robert Frost says, *home is the place where, when you have to go there, they have to take you in.*

There's been some discussion as to whether
The son was truly repentant or just truly hungry.

Luke 15:17-19 NRSV “But when he came to his senses he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired hands have bread enough and to spare, but here I am dying of hunger!

¹⁸ I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; ¹⁹ I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands.””

Was it an honest confession from a contrite heart?
Or a contrived spiel due to an empty stomach?

Either way, the father interrupts him immediately
As if it didn't matter what he said

And quickly turns and orders the hired help
To go and find the best beeve in the barnyard
Butcher it and grill the whole darn thing.

And then, after it's on the grill
Go out and invite the neighbors
Tell them we're throwing a party.

Well, let me ask
If you were a friend or neighbor, would you go?

There are parties not worth going to.

I mean, why would the old man
Want to celebrate the boy's return?

After all he done in shaming the family like that?

Asking for and receiving his inheritance.

Why would the old man do that?

And taking off without even telling anyone
Had the old man sick with worry.

So where's he been all this time?
What's he been up to?

Quoting Craddock on this one

Where's he been? You idiot, you don't know where's he's been? He's been eating with the hogs, living with the hogs, acting like a hog.

Took every penny of his inheritance and blew it on wine, women, and song. Paid out hundreds of dollars to women who sell their favors, lost his clothes, lost his job, can't find a job except slopping hogs.

And now, with nowhere to go
He's gone back to his dad's
With his tail between his legs.

And listen to this, his old man took him back.
Without even without an apology
Can you imagine?

And not only took him back
He's throwing him a party.

A real humdinger of one too!

No sir, I ain't going.
It ain't worth my time.

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So, we are looking at this wrong.

The story is not really about the son.

And unrepentant sinner who only came home
Because he had nowhere else to go?

It is about him, but it isn't.

It is not really about the dutiful elder son's attitude
At seeing his father disgrace himself
By welcoming the younger son back home.

He, who complained bitterly about his father's behavior

It is about him, but it isn't.

It is not really about the friend or neighbor's opinion either.

We do have an opinion on the old man's soft behavior
And wouldn't have accepted him back
With some promise to pay back the inheritance.

I mean, it is about them, but it isn't.

It is about all those perspectives, but it isn't.

Rather, it is about the father's unconditional love
For his children, sinners and saints alike.

It is about the foolishness of the father's love.

The whole reason Jesus told the story
Was because of the criticisms from the Pharisees
Concerning Jesus and who he hung with.

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I have three insights concerning this kind of love.
The first one comes from verse 20.

Ever since, the boy left
The father was beside himself with worry.

Every morning when eating his breakfast
And drinking his coffee
When hearing the front screen door slam

It gave his old heart a start thinking his son had returned.

Every evening after chores
He'd sit on the front porch
As the sun faded beyond the hills.

He'd sit and peer down the driveway
To where it curved out of sight behind the evergreens
Hoping to catch a glimpse of his coming.

When he'd go to town to buy feed
He would peer into the faces of those he met
Hoping he just might find his son's.

It was midday when the son returned.

The father had eaten dinner
And stepped out onto the porch for one last look
Before returning to work.

As he squinted his eyes in the bright sun
He saw a figure with a familiar stride.

**Luke 15:20 NLT “And while he was still a long way off,
his father saw him coming.**

**Filled with love and compassion, he ran to his son,
embraced him, and kissed him.”**

It wasn't the son, full of humility and remorse
Kneeling before his father asking for forgiveness.

It was the father when he recognized him
Jumped off the porch

And met him in the driveway
And grabbed him up in the biggest of bear hugs.

His love was spontaneous.

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The second insight is the father's further response.

After completely ignoring the son's canned apology
The father quickly got things going.

“Go, get his bath water running
Get him some shaving cream and a razor
Bring out something for him to wear.

Go start the grill and invite the neighbors

We are going to have a party
This neighborhood won't soon forget.

His love was gracious.

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And our third insight in today's lesson
Is the father's reason for it all.

Luke 15:24 NIV For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.'

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I remember taking special note of this verse
When I was in seminary.

The worship leader for Wednesday chapel
Was our professor of systematic theology.

He was a very academic and heady person.

But as he was reading this passage
When he got to this verse
He got choked up and couldn't finish.

So profound was his own experience.

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A lady once came into my pastor's study.

She wanted my advice.

She was conservative when it came to human sexuality.

She believed an acceptable marriage
Was only between a man and a woman.

Her daughter had only recently come out
And planned to marry her female partner
And invited the mother to the wedding.

And? I said.

She asked what she should do.

She thought if she went
It would appear she condones
A lifestyle she couldn't accept.

I asked, "Do you love her?"

"Of course, I do."

"Then you have to go!"

"You have to show your love for her is unconditional."

Come to find out later, she didn't go after all.

It was a party she didn't think worth going to.

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The kind of love the foolish father shows in our parable
Is the kind of love God expresses for us
Is the kind of love we are to emulate.

It is the kind of love that sits on the front porch
Peering off down the driveway day by day
Longing to catch a glimpse of a lost loved one.

**1 John 3:1 NIV See what great love the Father has
lavished on us, that we should be called children of
God! And that is what we are!**

Oh, the foolishness of the father's love.