

Trinity IX

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Date: 28 July 2024

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[0 : 00] In our gospel text this morning of Luke chapter 15, we are given the tale of two sons who were also brothers.

The younger son in this story was one who had a total disregard for his father or anyone else. This rebellious son left his family, taking his inheritance and then squandering his wealth by living a life of debauchery.

He lived as a libertine, enjoying the present moment, never considering the disrespect he was bringing upon his family.

Eat, drink, and be merry for tomorrow you die was the motto, the attitude of this younger and wayward son. We are told that after a time of reckless living, this rebellious son was suddenly broke.

He had nothing. He owned nothing. He was hungry and destitute. Therefore, he was reduced to coveting pig slop, the lowest of the unclean creatures in the Jewish kosher laws.

[1 : 18] So what did this wayward son do? Well, he returned to his home, hoping to become a slave or a servant, as he had already renounced his birthright like Esau.

What he expected back home was to be condemned, to be shunned, to be put out by an angry father.

But of course, that's not what happened. We read in Luke chapter 15, verses 20 through 24. And he, this is the wayward son, and he arose and came to his father.

But when he was still a great way off, his father saw him, had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him.

And the son said to him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight, and I am no longer worthy to be called your son.

[2 : 23] But the father said to his servants, Bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet, and bring the fatted calf here and kill it, and let us be merry.

For my son was dead and is alive again. He was lost and is found. This is one of the most vivid depictions of rebellion, repentance, and restoration in all of Holy Scripture.

And of course, this story really represents us in relationship to our father. It represents our waywardness, our rebellion against our God.

We all, like sheep, have gone astray. Each of us has turned to our own way, the Bible says.

Therefore, we are called to repent.

To repent. To turn from our wickedness and come back to our father. And instead of scorn and wrath, we receive grace.

[3 : 34] We receive mercy from our loving Lord. And this younger son was not made a slave. No. He was received back.

Not only as a son, but then given the royal treatment. But the story does not necessarily have a happy ending.

No. The older son. The older son, who did not rebel or demand his inheritance from his father, was not happy about his brother's return.

As a matter of fact, he was irate. He was mad. We go on to read in Luke chapter 15, verses 28 through 30. But he, this older son and brother, was angry.

It would not go in. Therefore, his father came out and he pleaded with him. So he answered and said to his father, Lo, these many years I have been serving you and never transgressed your commandment at any time.

[4 : 39] And yet, you never gave me a young goat that I might make merry with my friends. But as soon as this son of yours, who has devoured your livelihood with harlots, you killed the fatted calf

for him.

To truly understand why Jesus is telling this parable, we need to go back and look at the first two verses here of Luke chapter 15.

It gives us the context. We read, In other words, this story represents the attitude of the religious leaders, the scribes and the Pharisees, as they represent the older son in this story.

And the whole point of this story is simply this. The younger son represents wayward sinners who are now called to come home.

Because God has come now in human flesh, in the person of Jesus. And Jesus is calling all human beings to come to repent from their rebellion and to come home into the kingdom of God.

[6 : 10] As we hear in the comfortable words during liturgy, our Lord says, Come unto me, all ye that travail and are heavy laden, and I will refresh you.

The older son here represents the resentful religious leaders who look down upon the wayward because they fail to see their own sin, their own rebellion.

They're too busy judging everybody else and never taking inventory of themselves. These religious leaders believe that they are the chosen ones of God.

Therefore, they have no need for a savior. So where do you and I fit in this story? I'd like to suggest a couple of things we need to take from this parable.

First, we need to be people who see our own sin and our own waywardness. People who are constantly standing over others in judgment and spewing forth their own verdicts are often some of the most selfish and self-righteous people.

[7 : 24] And such people often fail to see their own sin because they're too busy looking at everyone else. The first response of someone who is truly repentant is to humble oneself before God and to confess one's own sin.

We are not to take an apathetic or an indifferent attitude to sin. We're not to make light of sin. And I'm not suggesting that.

But the first and proper response is to see our own failings. Mea culpa, mea culpa, my fault. And we are to do this before we cast judgment upon others.

The second point is that this story should inform our understanding about God. Our God is not some capricious deity.

I say that all the time on purpose. Because in America, we live in this context where deism is so prevalent and deism is the idea that we are down here, God is up there, and the two shall never meet.

[8 : 39] No, God is not some distant and disinterested force in the sky. Our God is the one who has come in human flesh to embrace us.

He came so that he might make us a royal priesthood. He came so that we might be more than conquerors over sin, death, and the devil.

He came so that we might have life. Our God is the one who came to seek and save the lost by becoming man and offering his own life in pure love on the cross for each and every one of you.

Our God is the one who washes, who feeds, who brings us into his family, his own body, the church.

And by the way, the church is not a man-made institution. It's not a voluntary association. It is the very body of Jesus. He established the church, and he will preserve his church for all eternity.

[9 : 55] And he is the God who calls us all to come home, no matter what skeletons we have in our closet or what shameful things have happened in our past.

He is the one who says your past no longer defines you. So quit dwelling on it. You are a new creature in Christ Jesus.

Therefore, true faith does not wallow in the past, does not just continue to relive the past. True faith is an attitude of giving thanks in the present so that we have a heart filled with hope for the future.

Friends, what we have before us this morning is a beautiful picture of love and grace from a father who desires to have communion with us, who desires to have communion with you.

God calls us all to come home and to live as grateful servants for his goodness and his love made manifest in the Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

[11 : 10] Amen. In the name of the Father and of the Son of the Holy Ghost. Amen.