

Saint Thomas' Church
Trinity IX
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rmcneely+
thou art ever with me and all that I have is thine

Today we resume the Trinity Summer Survey of Christian Doctrine with probably the most well known of Jesus' 30 parables: the Prodigal Son. We all know the story well and instantly recognize it from its opening verse.

But less well known are the circumstances that led Jesus to give it to us.

The Prodigal Son is actually one of three parables that Jesus told in series to the Pharisees that day. Each one to demonstrate the forgiveness of God Each one involved loss and recovery Each one ended with the joy of renewal and recovery. Each one involving increasing value in that which was lost

It was a time when the troubled Pharisees were attempting to bate Jesus into saying or doing something that would form the basis for his prosecution.

This time they were pointing out that Jesus spent time with the poor, the outcasts of Jewish society.

He even took meals with them. The Pharisees said Jesus must be one of them if He spent so much time there.

“guilt by association” that they hoped would reduce His followers or at least make them question who He was.

All three parables were to the same object:
God's forgiveness knows no bounds
He celebrates the repentance of a single sinner.

Jesus was showing the Pharisees that His time with the outcasts
Was the mission of God
To save mankind
To save sinners from themselves and from the Devil.

History documents that the Pharisees were not persuaded.
Our prayer is that Jesus will be more successful with us.

I have had the privilege of preaching on the Prodigal Son parable
Every year for the last 6 years and a few times before that.
Good preaching demands fresh approaches
So this year
I thought we'd look at the parable
from a different angle.

We know the people in the Parable
The Father represents God
The older brother represents the Pharisees and also us
The prodigal represents sinners of all sorts.

We know the sins of the Prodigal
He crudely demands his inheritance in such a fashion
as if to seek
the premature death of his father.
He seeks to leave the heaven like state
Of life with his father
With God.
He turns his back on God and walks away.

He does nothing with the inheritance to glorify God
Instead, he selfishly spends the inheritance of God
On himself
He squanders it in waste and ruin.

We know the major thrust of the parable
The unlimited love and forgiveness of God

This morning I want to explore another
More subtle aspect of the parable.

To do so, let me tell you a story:
A young man was graduating from university.

His family was of wealth and threw a great party to celebrate.

The son thought he deserved
And was entitled to an expensive gift from his father.
He set upon an expensive foreign sports car
And made his demand quite clear.

At the party,
His father presented him a beautifully wrapped box.

Perplexed, the young man opened it
And found a leather Bible
Inscribed with the young man's name in gold.
Gilt edged pages
A thing of beauty.

The son was incensed.
He had asked for and expected to receive a sports car
He thrust the Bible at his father and railed at him
With all your money
You could think of giving me nothing but a Bible
He stormed out, slamming the door behind
His father dumbfounded, watched him leave.

The young man refused to have anything to do with his father after that.

Despite many attempts, the father could never make contact with his son.

Years past, with no contact between father and son

One day the son received word from a solicitor

His father had died leaving everything to the son.

It was months later as he was going through his father's things at the manor house

That he came upon the box

That had been his gift at the graduation party.

Without thinking

He took the Bible out and

And opened it where a red ribbon marked a passage

And as he did, Something fell from the Bible

And made a noise as it hit the floor.

He picked it up

It was a key on a key ring with a tag

naming a foreign car dealer

On it read "Paid in full, Love, Dad"

with the Son's date of graduation many years before.

It was the key to the car the boy had craved.

His father had highlighted a passage in Matthew 7:11:

"If ye then, being evil,

know how to give good gifts unto your children,

how much more shall your Father which is in heaven,

give good things to those that ask Him."

How little the son knew his father.

How little he knew the character, the generosity and love of the man.

In his pride,
the son had squandered
one of the most precious things on earth
The unqualified love of a parent
He not only denied himself, but his father.
Wasted the last years of what their lives could have been together.

Are we sometimes like that with our Father in Heaven?
Do we know and appreciate His love?
His generosity?

Some say the most interesting character in Jesus' parable of the
Prodigal Son
Is the older brother.
The brother, who will not join the celebration
Will not rejoice at the return of his young sibling.
Who remains outside, brooding.

He finally addresses his father
Complaining that he has been faithful and dutiful
Yet there was never so much as recognition for his service
Not a party, no music, no dancing
Never so much as a goat for the dinner fare.

His father replies
God replies:
"Son, thou art ever with me
And all that I have is thine."

The older brother in the parable represents us, you and me.
And God is telling us that we are ever with Him

He is ever with us
 in prayer
 In communion.
 In the sacraments
 In His Word,
 In creation,
 That beautifully exquisite flower
 That dramatic sun rise
 The moon set
 The just right comforting word
 at just the right time from a parent
 The gentle touch of a lover
 The gentle guiding hand in a moment of danger
 The eyes of a new born baby
 A final breath at the moment of death.
 He is there.

Have you ever felt His presence?
 Defying all your senses,
 you knew that He was with you?

Are we like the young university graduate
 who abandoned his father
 Do we know His character and the depth of God's love?

"All that I have is thine".

In the parable God promises that everything He has is ours.
 The Father makes a straightforward testamentary disposition
 Such as you would find in a Last Will and Testament
 Giving all that he has to the older son.
 Promising the inheritance of all God has and is to us.

When can such a promise be fulfilled?
 At our death?
 Is that when we inherit all that God has?

The promise then, would have nothing to do with the material things of this life.

It must have to do with
greater,
timeless
and ethereal things.

The only thing we know that we take with us
into the next life
is our soul.

Or might there be something else?

Is love immortal?

It certainly survives the loss of those we love.
Do those whom we have lost maintain their love for us?
Is heaven and immortal life
Love fulfilled
In perpetuity?
Is that our inheritance from God?

Can we of this life even imagine the eternal inheritance,
Perpetual life with God,
Timeless Eternity in heaven?

You are with me always
Everything I have is thine.

