

Sermon - Year C 4th Sunday in Lent 27/03/22 MVLC DJK

³¹ His father replied, "My son, you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. ³² But we should be glad and celebrate! Your brother was dead, but he is now alive. He was lost and has now been found."

This parable is always called, "The Prodigal Son," but not by Jesus.

When Jesus begins the story, he says, "A man had two sons" (v.11).

This is a parable of the prodigal God and his two sons.

Prodigal means 'recklessly extravagant' – isn't that our God – recklessly extravagant toward us.

God is the prodigal one.

What we have done over history is to focus on the first son – and that emotional meeting when he comes home from the pits, from feeding pigs and starving, from a life of waste and abuse to the loving arms of the waiting Father.

We melt as we imagine the grace of God welcoming us home no matter what we've done.

I'm not sure if Jesus meant this parable to be a warm fuzzy. Because there are some people who become furious when they hear the story.

TWO KINDS OF PEOPLE

Luke tells us there are two kinds of people listening to the parable.

There are Pharisees and the teachers of the law, religious people, who are "muttering and complaining about Jesus".

And there are "tax collectors and sinners" eager to hear Jesus.

I imagine the Tax collectors and sinners connect well with the younger brother – the one who went a bit ferrel.

I bet they're wondering just how this wayward younger son will get back to the Father.

I imagine the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, the religious people, connect well with the older brother, the one who stays at home and does everything right.

I bet they're wondering how the older brother gets back with the father.

Isn't it strange that the 'sinners' were attracted to Jesus teaching and the religious people despised him?

We see this right through the gospels.

Whenever there's a religious person like a pharisee, and an sinful, outcast person like Zaccheus, or the sinful woman with the perfume, or the Samaritan woman, it is always the sinner, outcast people who connect with Jesus.

Of the two brothers it's the "sinful" brother who wants to be with the father – and it's the brother who does everything right hates the Father.

Jesus even says, "*The tax collectors and the prostitutes enter the kingdom before you 'upright' religious leaders*".

There's no warm fuzzy here – this is an offense to those who do right.

Tax collectors and prostitutes are in??

But the ones who go to church every week, who attend all the meetings, and go to all the working bees are out.

A plain offence.

For the tax collectors and prostitutes and sinful people Jesus message is mostly heard wrong.

'I am going to heaven before the upright leaders' – wow I have some kind of right to heaven.

We must know that the only way to the Father is through Jesus – no one comes to the Father unless I call them.

Let's look closely.

The younger brother believed he could come home by being sorry and working his debt off – that was his plan – "dad I'll just be a hired hand" – (better than nothing he was thinking)

How happy he was when he realised the Father was not the slightest bit interested in his stupid plan to work his way back.

The Older brother believed he could come to the Father by doing good and obeying all the rules.

How sad he was when he realised the Father was not the slightest bit interested in his good works.

Can we see it, both the brothers, believed they could come to the Father on their own terms?

One working off their debt, paying for their sins, and one doing good works, yes, also paying for their sins.

Can't we see it's the Father alone, who goes out to the younger son and ignores his plan to work off his debt and welcomes him fully back into the family.

He even gets the ring and the calf – to bad if he came home as a vegan.

Can't we see it's the Father who goes out to the older brother and "begs" him to come in.

The father is the prodigal one – the recklessly extravagant one – willing to pour out his grace on both sons.

It's the Father who is willing to ignore both his sons' futile efforts and offer them his pure amazing grace alone.

Funny how we think we have a right to the Father – to heaven – by doing works – by paying off debt – or by doing good works.

It's just not like that.

The only thing we can take home from all this is what Jesus says – sinful people have ears to hear God's word and are willing to receive his grace - like the younger brother.

And religious people who do right do not have ears to hear God's word and receive his grace.

That's not warm and fuzzy.

Salvation is for those who receive what they don't expect.

People who really know the depth of their sin do not expect Salvation.

"Lord have mercy on me a sinner" they cry.

This story comes up during Lent for a reason.

It's to remind us that Jesus is walking to the cross for us.

Where do you sit?

Do you or your family work to pay off your debt toward God.

Is your Christian worth in your work?

Are you satisfied with your work toward God – satisfied enough to think that God owes you.

Let's be reminded that Jesus is walking to the cross – no one comes the Father but by him alone.

You are worthy of the Father because Jesus paid your debt, because Jesus done every good for you.

I went to John Smiths funeral (John Smith from God Squad) a few years ago.

He made a life ministry helping unworthy people believe that Jesus makes them worthy.

He was kicked out of his original church because he welcomed the outcastes and the misfits.

The obedient, religious, life members of his original church did not like him welcoming outcasts and misfits into the church –because they had not earned their right to the pew they were sitting on.

When the message of the gospel is clear, religious people tend to dislike it, while irreligious people are intrigued and attracted.

Listen and learn, Murray Valley Lutheran Community. It's the sinful people who are shown love who have ears to hear.

Frustrating isn't it?

The robber on the cross next to Jesus – his hands nailed – Physically impossible to do anything good – he lived a whole life of evil – he gets to go to heaven – because he trusted Jesus.

It's so wrong says the younger brother.

It's so wrong says the older brother.

It's so right says Jesus.

By his actions the Father says to his two sons – your works are a distraction, your works are nothing but filthy rags to me – Isaiah discovered this and wrote it down.

Anything we do for God with the wrong motive is but filthy rags to him.

Anything we do out of love, or thanks, or praise for what Jesus has done for us bring a warmth to his heart.

Let's not get lost through good works.

Hear Jesus voice, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

If only the two brothers had known the heart of the Father – the Father is the servant – Gottesdiens – (our God is a serving God). Let God be God. If nothing else the greatest thing you can say is "thank-you" that is acknowledging a serving God – and his son the Servant King.

Do you know the Fathers heart?

Take your load, take your burden to him, and know the Fathers heart.

Do you know the sons mission statement?

It often comes a as surprise: "I have come to serve and not be served and give my life for many". (Matt 20:28)

As we walk with Jesus toward Easter just look at him set on the cross for us, to pay the debt, to be obedient – for us.

*Lord send us your holy spirit gift of faith so that we can rely on Jesus and not on ourselves.
Amen.*