

“The Waiting Father”

Text: Luke 15:24 INI Lent 4 Wayzata 3/14/10

Don't tell me what to do! I'll do just as I please! That's an attitude all has either been used on us or we have used it on someone else or at least thought it. It's especially used on those who give orders or advice. It's the cry of rebellion. It shakes the very foundation stones of our cooperation with others. It wrecks the very interdependence we have with others. It negatively affects even the closest relationships we have with each other.

Actually it's an age-old cry by human beings to God after the Fall into sin. Don't tell me what to do God! This morning a son uses it. He wants to go out into the world. Most people entitle this parable “The Prodigal Son.” He is not the hero of the story; the father is.

Looking at this parable from the perspective of the son only really gets part of the flavor of the story. You could also call it the story of two lost sons. One who went away to a far country and spent his time in wild living. And the other who stayed at home and was alienated from both his father and his brother.

Personally I like the title for this parable as “The Waiting Father”. German theologian Helmut Thelicke gave it that title. He said this title for the parable depicts the real message of the love in the story Jesus told. It shows why there could be a change in the son's heart and even the possibility of a return home. We might miss it in the this story. Maybe it comes to some of us when we change our roles from sons to fathers. Without the Waiting Father the son could never even consider returning.

The temptation to go and do your own thing is not really a temptation of youth alone. There is always the luster of the grass on the other side of the fence, we yearn for carefree days without what confines us in our day to day living. That was the lure for the youngest son in this story. He was tempted and unable to resist it.

Some might fault the father as too permissive. We might say, “No kid of mine will ever just get his/her own way whenever he/she wants it. My kid will toe the mark or get nothing.” This father seemed modern for his time. He gave the son his freedom. He trusted him to have the intelligence and common sense not to get into trouble.

When the son asked for his inheritance in that culture and that time he virtually said, “Drop dead!” to his father. In order for him legally to receive his inheritance his father had to die.

The father probably knew better what to expect of his son but hoped against hope the worse wouldn't happen. His heart must have ached. It does with every parent when you cut one loose from the nest even when you are satisfied they are equipped to meet life as it is.

The younger son wasted no time in living his life the way he wanted. He was in a far country and no one there would know him or his family. Jesus uses a word in telling this story that fully describes such a life. He lived an unsaved life. For His listeners no other details needed to be told. That kind of life left the young man bankrupt. Not just that his financial resources were gone so were his inner resources. Even before his financial resources left him he is still spiritually bankrupt. In his case both came at the same time.

What ever he'd gotten from his father was gone, nothing left at all. That included ambition, aspirations, creativity, all were gone. He was bankrupt morally, spiritually, ethically, and physically. If he had a well adjusted personality it became obsessed and he could not step back from it. He was now cornered by the consequences of his life style; he was enslaved by his lust. Now he has nothing.

Some people when they reach this stage of life find a way to return. Some do not. This young man went even lower. He finds himself doing things he would never have dreamed of before. He fed pigs, unclean animals. His religion forbids him to come near them. More than that, he wanted to eat their food.

Guilt mutilates his mind. His passions have betrayed him. They can do that to anyone. It may be booze, gambling, sex, pornography, and drugs. This young man became a slave to his passions in an vicious unending constricting circle that finally starves the soul and may lead physical. He is in a hell on earth he has made for himself. At this point some people see no earthly escape, suicide.

There is, however an unearthly escape. It is only through the power of a loving God to change the heart and mind of the person so drastically that they turn from that kind of life altogether. I've witnessed that kind of change in people in the depths of despair over what they have been doing and what it has done to them. Jesus

gift of forgiveness and renewal by the Holy Spirit is all there is in this whole world that can work that kind of change that kind of transformation.

The Waiting Father God's love cuts through the vicious circle of enslavement. God's love says to the sinner, "Look here stands the waiting Father." The younger son realized that even the hired men in his father's house were better off than he was. He wanted to go back and expected to receive no better treatment than his father gave his hired men.

When the father sees him he runs to him with open arms, tears of joy, and a reception the younger son never dreamed would happen. "My son that was dead is alive again, was lost and is found." By the laws of the time he needn't have done that. He was not required to take his son back. He did it because he loved him so much it compelled him to take him back. What a picture this is of our Father, our waiting Father.

The son comes back. He is alive. He had been dead when he left and didn't know it. Now the Father makes him a live in his family again. The father restores him to live in the love, happiness, and wholeness that he wanted him to have in the first place. In Jesus God, our Father, helps each of us to cut that vicious circle of death through Jesus death for us on the cross and His resurrection. He beats death for us so that we can rise each day to live a new life.

He waits for a sinner that has fallen as far as the young man in this story fell. How much more will He be waiting for us who may never have really fallen that far.

And now to the lesson of the second son. It seems he stayed around grudgingly doing his work just waiting for his father to die so he could get the inheritance. He doesn't show love he wants favoritism. The lesson for us is that what we do for the Lord needs to be done out of love not of entitlement.

Don't miss seeing the love that surrounds both sons. The Father loves both sons with the same waiting patience. Connect to the love shown both of them. Look for that waiting Father every day. He stands with arms open for us to come to Him. To confess our so-called 'little sins' so He can forgive them. So, all of us; the prodigal, the self-righteous and the older son, hear from the lips of the Waiting Father, "He was lost and is found." He runs to meet us. He wants to meet us. We're coming Father, we're coming. Amen.