

Lenten

Reflections



The Divine Intervention

February 27, 2016

Scripture

Luke 15:1-3, 11-32

Tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to listen to Jesus, but the Pharisees and scribes began to complain, saying,

“This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.”

So to them Jesus addressed this parable.

“A man had two sons, and the younger son said to his father,

‘Father, give me the share of your estate that should come to me.’

So the father divided the property between them.

After a few days, the younger son collected all his belongings

and set off to a distant country

where he squandered his inheritance on a life of dissipation.

When he had freely spent everything,

a severe famine struck that country,

and he found himself in dire need.

So he hired himself out to one of the local citizens

who sent him to his farm to tend the swine.

And he longed to eat his fill of the pods on which the swine fed,

but nobody gave him any.

Coming to his senses he thought,

'How many of my father's hired workers
have more than enough food to eat,
but here am I, dying from hunger.
I shall get up and go to my father and I shall say to him,
"Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you.
I no longer deserve to be called your son;
treat me as you would treat one of your hired workers.'"
So he got up and went back to his father.
While he was still a long way off,
his father caught sight of him, and was filled with compassion.
He ran to his son, embraced him and kissed him.
His son said to him,
'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you;
I no longer deserve to be called your son.'
But his father ordered his servants,
'Quickly, bring the finest robe and put it on him;
put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet.
Take the fattened calf and slaughter it.
Then let us celebrate with a feast,
because this son of mine was dead, and has come to life again;
he was lost, and has been found.'
Then the celebration began.
Now the older son had been out in the field
and, on his way back, as he neared the house,
he heard the sound of music and dancing.
He called one of the servants and asked what this might mean.
The servant said to him,
'Your brother has returned
and your father has slaughtered the fattened calf
because he has him back safe and sound.'
He became angry,
and when he refused to enter the house,
his father came out and pleaded with him.
He said to his father in reply,
'Look, all these years I served you

and not once did I disobey your orders;
yet you never gave me even a young goat to feast on with my friends.
But when your son returns
who swallowed up your property with prostitutes,
for him you slaughter the fattened calf.'
He said to him,
'My son, you are here with me always;
everything I have is yours.
But now we must celebrate and rejoice,
because your brother was dead and has come to life again;
he was lost and has been found.'"

Our Scripture Reflection

The details of today's most familiar Gospel parable really call into question the long standing use of the title, "The Prodigal Son":

First the younger son:

1. Demands his share of his inheritance, of which he was entitled to 1/3, but only after the father's death. This is tantamount to wishing the father dead!
2. Rather than punish or even disown the younger son, the father hands over the money quickly and without question.
3. The son blows all of the money as a public sinner.
4. The son brings extreme shame on the father, and in fact, the entire village, by ending up working for Gentiles (owners of pigs).
5. The son creates a half-hearted speech which he plans to use when he returns to the father. Please note: he doesn't want to go back begging which he deserved to do, no, he wants the father to treat him like a "hired hand" with dignity and benefits!
6. Before he can get his rehearsed speech out completely the father comes running towards him (men did not run back then), cuts off the son's speech, puts the family signet ring on his finger (symbolizing the son's belonging to the family again), orders shoes to be put on his feet (the footwear of a free man) and orders a feast to be prepared.

And the older son??

1. Is upset that he was not informed of the banquet ahead of time, something he was entitled to by family custom.
2. Has to learn about the banquet from a servant....how humiliating.
3. Because the older son is jealous, angry and upset (he has followed all of the rules but

his younger brother had not), the father rather than send a servant to summons the older son, comes out begging the son to join him in his spontaneous celebration. That the older son refused to go inside would have been considered an embarrassing act of disobedience towards the father.

The father broke all of the customs and rules to show mercy to both sons. The father treated neither son with the gross disrespect with which he had been treated by them. The father is generous beyond belief to those who showed him no kindness in return. So do you see why we should change the parable's title?

Did you ever imagine that God would be so generous towards you?

Food for your Journey

I do not understand the mystery of grace -- only that it meets us where we are, but does not leave us where it found us.

--Anne Lamott, *Traveling Mercies: Some Thoughts on Faith* (Anchor, 1999), 143.

Prayer from the Heart

Dear Jesus, You went to the cross for my sins long before I could say, "I am sorry." Your love for me is far beyond what I deserve. May I this day give You a humbled and contrite heart as my way of saying, "Thank you." Amen.