

“Reflections on the Prodigal Son”
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This July, we began a simple Sunday night 6 p.m. contemplative worship service. This past Sunday night I asked one of my parishioners, my dear wife of thirty-three years, Robin, to offer her spiritual reflections on the very familiar parable that Jesus taught, the Parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32). I am going to share with you some of my take aways from her three points of the younger son’s request, the son’s return, and the reaction of the Father.

The younger son’s request that his father give him the share of property that will belong to him is a rebellion and a choice for a type of voluntary displacement. This younger son would not wait on his father’s natural passing so he could receive his share at the natural time. Instead, the younger son takes and goes to a distant country. With his father, the younger son already has all he would need to enjoy his life – food, a home, an occupation, clothing, and love. This child is off because of his own desires and will. He thought I must live “out there” in the land of elsewhere in order to obtain a fulfilled, peaceful and happy life.

This child lives recklessly and eventually finds himself not better fed, but close to starving; not better clothed, but with a dirty, tattered robe and perhaps even no sandals; not better employed, but used up and spent out by his work; not with new friends and community, but aware that there is a lack of concern by others about his welfare; and not more peaceful, but driven to a spiritual and emotional “bottom” with harshness and severity.

Why do we like this younger son, and Adam and Eve, want what God *doesn’t* give us, or what he hasn’t given us *yet*? When we leave the Father, we become enslaved. We keep trying to find our “true self” in a world of “false love.” Why do we sometimes send ourselves where we think we need to be? Is it not because of our sin, our attachments, our addictions, our obsessions, our compulsions, our own limited way of thinking and seeing the world, our past traumas, our damaged selves, our disordered thinking? All of these reasons lead us to distant countries, to turn away from the Father. The mystery of God’s love is that we are loved so much that we are free to leave, but we come to understand God loves us so much that we don’t want to leave.

As for the younger son’s return, he models for us a return of being a child again as Jesus explains, “unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven” (Matt 18:3). Like Nicodemus came to understand, we too have to be born again (John 3:1-21). We have to have that second innocence-since our first innocence is gone. We have to become like the younger son, and when we have found ourselves in a distant country, we have to turn, and then re-turn, and go to the Father we left and be embraced.

Finally, let us consider the Father's reaction to his younger son's return. Perhaps the father is also prodigal. Another meaning of prodigal is "having or giving something on a lavish scale." Isn't the father *lavish* when he runs filled with compassion toward his son and puts a robe on him—the *best* robe? And isn't the father lavish when he puts a ring on the younger son's finger — meaning he trusts his son — *still*--even after everything the younger son has done? And isn't the father lavish when he gives his younger son sandals? The son is not barefoot any longer — like the hired help or like the enslaved workers.

Through conscious choices, like the younger son, let us too come to ourselves, and go back to the Father — step by step; let us not hide and stay away. With our empty hands, a humble spirit, a repentant attitude, a mindset to accept the life that God gives, and a desire to love Him with all our hearts and all our soul and all our mind. I invite us to cease taking from God so that we can learn to receive what He gives. I invite us to return from wandering in distant places, so we can be at home with the Father. Let us cease resisting, so God can do for us and love on us how He wants. Let us picture ourselves in the Father's embrace, being transformed and reborn.