

## REPENTANCE WITH LOVE AND RECONCILIATION

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(Scripture Lesson: Luke 15:11-32)

From the Scripture lesson that I read to you, we heard about the Parable of the Prodigal Son. In this parable, we could see that the father was a man of means and perhaps he was popular in the community. We can be sure that he was also a godly man. He was close to God, and must have been active in the work of the church. However, we wonder whether he was a success in rearing up his two sons. Perhaps in the end we would say he was. But I think, like some other parents he went through some real difficulties dealing with his sons. He shared in the common problem of many parent today who find it hard to understand their children, especially the teen-agers. As someone has said, "Even those who know something about adolescent psychology somehow find the actual dealing with their children a very trying experience." The father in the parable had to face a similar situation in the case of his younger son, who was perhaps still a teenager, or in his early twenties. To that young man, the world was beginning to unfold. Dormant thoughts were stirring and he wanted to enjoy the liberty of youth.

In the light of the parable, the father's handicap was that he had no wife to help him manage the house and the children. Perhaps she died when the children were still young. And so, he became the father and the mother to his two growing sons.

The parable seems to point out that the father had spoiled the younger son. Being the father, he had not seem to be able to say, "No" to the wishes of that boy. Maybe he knew it was useless to say "no" and that the wiser thing for him to do was to let his son do as he pleased, hoping that someday the boy would realize what is best.

The young man said to his father, "Father, give me the portion of goods that fulleth to me." It was an imperious demand. He knew that he was entitled to a portion of his father's property. He knew that he had a share from his father's property. But then he should have said, "Father, would you be kind enough to let me have my share in your property?" or "Would you please allow me to manage that portion of your wealth I am supposed to inherit from you?" No, he did not say "please". He did not say, "would you be kind enough". He demanded by saying give me." He was in effect saying, "Don't you ask me why. And don't you say no. That belongs to me and I want to spend it in my own way. Come on, give it to me now." He was discourteous in his demand. He could not afford to be polite. He locked the virtue of respect for one who was older than he was, not even for his own father.

Someone has said and I quote: "the young people of today may well remember that whenever they behave unseemly and their conduct betrays their lack of courtesy and respect, they truly reincarnate the spirit of the prodigal son and become a thorn in the flesh and a disgrace to society. Many homes today are wrecked by prodigal sons and daughters who cannot control their passion and their temper, and who find it unpleasant to be disciplined by the guidance of filial love. When a young man or a young woman talks to his parents in a language that is bereft of any dignity, in a language that is filled with peril liberty and juvenile arrogance, he or

she has the stigma of the prodigal son and may someday end up in bitter disappointment. Very often the speech of a person is an index to his character, and his conversation with his parents or with his brothers and sisters reveals his spiritual maturity or immaturity."

Going back to the parable, the story says that the younger son, went to a far country and lived in a riotous living. What he did exactly we are not told, but we are sure he spent his money right and left. He must have gone to expensive pleasure spots and before he knew it, his pocketbook (passbook) was empty. As someone has commented, this young man was a wastrel because he did not know how hard it was to earn a living. He never worried about money, neither did he help his father in their business. All that he knew was to spend and to squander.

Now, is this not true to many young people even today? Their parents work hard to save in order that their children may not be wanting. But some young people who never cared about how their pocket money was secured, carelessly spend their allowance and then get broke even before the next supply comes in.

The parable tells us that when the prodigal son was already penniless, he came to realize that now he had to work in order to eat. So what he did perhaps was to look for a job. As a writer says, "the prodigal son went from one employment agency to another, from one company to another, asking if there was any vacancy for him." The writer continues to say, "perhaps one personnel manager who interviewed him was merciful enough to find out how he could take the young man in. He must have asked; "What can you do?" And the applicant hoping that he had a chance eagerly replied: "Anything, sir". "Can you type?" asked the manger. "No sir", said the applicant. "Well, said the interviewer, "Do you know stenography?" The young man paused for a moment and then innocently remarked, "I write faster in longhand than in shorthand." "Are you a college graduate?" asked the interviewer who was becoming a bit impatient. "No sir, " said the young man. "But I thought you went to college and that your father paid for your tuition fee for your senior year." "That's right, Sir, but I did not quite make it because you see Sir, I was always absent and I got F grade in most of my subjects." This time the personnel manager rose from his swivel chair, walked to his window, scratched his head and had a mixed feeling of pity and disappointment. He wanted to give that young man a good paying job, but he did not know anything. The manger went over the list of positions in the company only to discover that the young man was not fit for any of them. Finally the manager approached the young man and said, "Brother, I am sorry but there is no place for you here. You don't know how to type, you don't know anything about bookkeeping and cannot be even just an elevator boy but if you like, you can work on my piggery in my farm. Your job will be to feed the pigs morning and afternoon and I will pay you whatever your work is worth." The young man thought that since he was good for nothing he would at least try the job. After all, he need not be a college graduate to feed the pigs. It was one job that he could do." (end of quote)

At this juncture, it is indeed a pity that many young people even today do not take advantage of their educational opportunities. There are even young people who take pride in being delinquent in their studies. They would rather go gallivanting than stay at home and study their lessons. It may be sad to note that there are those who cannot go to college because of lack of means, but it is tragic to see those who are in school but are not making the most out of it.

Going back to the prodigal son, for the first time in his life, he learned what it meant to be hungry. Perhaps, before, whenever he felt like eating he would just go to his house and grab

whatever he wanted. But now out there in the field, he could feel the pain of hunger. Maybe there were nights when he had to go to sleep with an empty stomach. The Bible says, "He would have been glad to fill his belly with the pods that the pigs were eating; and no one gave him anything." (Luke 15:16) No one extended a helping hand to him.

And so the prodigal son realized his serious situation. Jesus described him saying, "he came to himself". The prodigal son, after feeling the pain of hunger while feeding the pigs in the farm, realized his serious blunder, and "he came to himself". A minister has said, the phrase, "he came to himself" suggests that all folly is madness. It is not consistent with our real selves." Our true nature reflects the image of God. Our perversity indicates our need of divine redemption. Repentance is the recovery of selfhood for it is the experience of coming back to God in whom we have our being. Of course, when we go into the depth of folly we oftentimes do it consciously and deliberately and yet to the eye of faith it is no less than cruel madness. The prodigal son realized this truth, and so he resolved to arise and go to his father and to confess: "Father, I had sinned against God and you...". In the light of this verse, the prodigal son, must have prayed hard for God's forgiveness and for reconciliation with his father.

And the Bible says, the merciful God heard the prayer of this repentant sinner, so that "while he was yet at a distance, his father saw him and had compassion and ran and embraced him and kissed him." But we may ask, "How could his father recognized him at that distance when he looked like a beggar pale and weak?" Well, let us say the father must have been waiting for him to come home. He must have been at the window most of the time praying for his dear son and waiting for him all the day long. And my brethren, this morning, this is the heart of the parable: that the waiting love of God can easily recognize the appearance of a repentant soul, and that there is great rejoicing among the angels of heaven for every lost sheep that can be found again. And so the father ordered his servants to bring quickly the best robe and to put on his son, to put a ring in his fingers and shoes on his feet. Chickens were killed and pigs were roasted and cows were butchered and perhaps an orchestra was hired and they had a big celebration in the house with music and dancing. But at this time of celebration, where there was music and dancing in the house, let us remember that the elder brother was still in the field and he did not know all about the merry-making. When he was nearing home he called one of the servants and asked what was going on in the house. The servant informed him that his brother had returned. Upon knowing that his brother had returned, did you expect him to run and shake hands with his brother and say, "Hello my brother, how was your adventure?" But he did not do that. His reaction was extremely unfavorable and bitter and sour. The Bible tells us that the older brother get mad and refused to go in. Seeing his elder son would not come in, the good father went out to him and talked with him. He pleaded with his son to come in, but the son refused. Then angrily the son retorted, "Lo, these many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command." Did he say, "All these years I have loved you?" He said, "All these years I have served you" He only served. But his service was devoid of love. He had not disobeyed his father's command, but he could not love a repentant brother. And because of this, we could say that he was, indeed a prodigal himself, a prodigal in his heart. It's true he did not leave his father's house, but his heart was in a far country. In fact, while working in his father's field, his heart was in the land of greed, envy and bitterness. And to prove this, he did not like anymore to call the younger son his brother. He said to his father, "This son of yours..." He did not say, " my brother".

Brethren, is this not the language of an embittered person? When a wife complains to her husband about their child, she says, "That child of yours". When an employee speaks to a co-

employee about their manager, "That boss of yours". When a church member speaks to a fellow member about their minister, he says, "That pastor of yours". And the elder son in the parable would not say, "my brother". He said, "That son of yours". And therefore he exposed the ugliness of his soul.

But the wise good father, who knew how to handle the situation, said to his elder son, "He is your brother". He wanted, at this point to impress upon his older son that he who came home was his brother. So he said to him, "Your brother was dead, and now he is alive; he was lost, and now he is found."

Was the older son after all persuaded to come in? In the parable, we are not told about it. But I would like to believe that after all he was persuaded to come in. That finally, he had enough courage to greet the guests and embrace his brother, and that by the grace of God they were reconciled to one another. I would like to believe that the elder son also realized the terrifying emptiness in his soul, and his lack of love for the members of his household. And perhaps, the case of the older son tells us today that we need not leave our homes in order to become prodigal children. We need not to go to a far country to indulge in riotous living, for right in our place, in our homes, in our church, in our community, we can be the lost sheep. When we cannot love a brother or a sister, father or mother, son or daughter, especially when that brother or father or son is truly repentant, we become prodigal in our hearts. We become prodigal in our hearts because if we cannot love, we have chosen not to be found in the forgiving grace of God. When we do not care what happens to our neighbors and when our self-righteousness causes us to rejoice at the failure of a weak brother, we exemplify the spirit of the elder son that can be saved only by some kind of spiritual surgery. One author says, "He who is lost in the jungle of sin and resentment cannot have God's peace even in a palace, but he who has found favor in the eyes of the Almighty will feel at ease even in the shanty surroundings of his poverty-stricken home."

Brethren, if there are still lost souls in this congregation this morning, they are hereby reminded that Christ came to seek and to save which was lost. Therefore, you need not remain hiding in the pews. You need not go home the same old ugly creatures. For right here, you find Him, it is because He has found you, then there shall be music in your heart and meaning in your life and a change in your outlook and somewhere you will feel within you the rejoicing of the angels above over one lost soul that has been found again. Amen.

***(Delivered on August 23, 1970 at The United Methodist Church,  
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