

What we’ve heard from the Gospel Luke this morning is one of the most well-known stories in the Bible. Many of you know this story well because you heard it so many times; I am sure this is also many people’s favorite story. So no wonder this is told over and over and people remember it well. I know when I was young, my church had a play based on this story and I played the father. I still remember some of the funny bloopers we had in the play after all those years.

Yes, this is a popular story and a good and important story too. That means, for preachers, it is a hard text to preach on.

But biblical texts always have something new and fresh for us. Even though this story is a familiar one, its power increases each time we hear it. We pick up something we didn’t find before; we hear something new we didn’t hear before. That’s why we call it the holy bible. God always speaks to us through His book in a new way so that we can continue to grow in our faith.

So the story is about this son who cashes out his inheritance and goes out of the country and spends all his money and ends up broke in a foreign land. But his father cannot forget him and waits for his return day and night. Feeling cold and hungry, one day, the son comes home and his father throws a party to welcome him, which makes the son’s brother unhappy.

Luke says Jesus was telling this story before a particular group of people; and the people were grumbling leaders of community: Pharisees and scribes. They were grumbling because Jesus was among the wrong people-- tax collectors and sinners. “This man receives sinners and eats with them,” they said. And as a way of responding to these unhappy leaders of the society, Jesus simply told this story—what we call the story of the Prodigal Son.

And we know what the story is; by this story, Jesus is telling them that God welcomes all including sinners. No, no, the word “welcome” is not strong enough; God is anxiously waiting, day and night, for every lost soul to come home. That is the message.

What I want us to think of for a while is this; the meaning of the Prodigal Son, especially the word “*Prodigal*.”

Of course, this word is not in the text. I don’t know when and who started calling this that way. Anyhow, what is the meaning of prodigal? Or, why do we call it the story of the Prodigal Son? We know: we use this word because of the son who went away, not the one who stayed home.

Then does that mean that the meaning of Prodigal is *went away* or *lost*? If you look up the dictionary, meaning: the word *prodigal* has many meanings: “wasteful;” “reckless,” “uncontrolled,” and “self-indulgent.”

The dictionary meaning for the word holds more; this second definition is *extravagant*; it means bounteous; it also means lavish. It means “generous in giving, exceedingly abundant.” *giving something in large amounts*.

That means, Prodigal is not a bad thing to be!

My point is this: if we want to use the word, *Prodigal*, here in this story, it is better for us to call it the story of Prodigal Father!

One preacher calls it the story of dysfunctional family. The reason is there is no mention of mother; and they have two sons and both of them are very greedy; they don’t like each other; we think the second son was lost but to me, the first son is not better; he does not even want to come into the house when his brother came home.

But see the face of their father; we can see how happy he is; we can imagine how merciful and generous he is; he is just reckless in his welcome of this wayward son. I don’t know if I really can understand this father; you old man, what are you doing? You are hugging and kissing this jerk; don’t you know how stupid you are?

The father would say, “I don’t care what you think!” I got my son back; I got my baby back; I got my life back; it doesn’t matter what the world would say to me; this is the way I do; this is who I am; I love my sons—good or bad; I just want them to come close to me.

I wouldn’t mind spending all of my possessions if I could get my lost son back.

This father is prodigal; he is indulgent; he is overwhelming in his forgiveness. That doesn’t mean he does not love his older son; the father loves him too; he says to the first one, “All that is mine is yours.” But the older son doesn’t like the fact that the father is too generous to his brother. He does not understand where the father is coming from.

We don’t know how this story ends. We don’t know if the older one joined the party later or not. But that is not really important; what are important are the actions of the father.

The father does what He wants to do on his own terms. The father is the one holding the power—granting the requests of the sons. Both of them have needs and desires, but God acts the way He wants, not the way they want.

But the bottom line is this: God loves all; He welcomes all, good or bad; he invites all to his party; maybe, to God, the second son was not the only one who was lost; the older was also lost; unless the older son joins the party, I know, the father will not be happy because he loves them all.

God is waiting for all His people, who are lost, to come home.

In a dream, Martin Luther found himself being attacked by Satan. The devil unrolled a long scroll containing a list of Luther’s sins, and held it before him.

On reaching the end of the scroll Luther asked the devil, “Is that all?” “No,” came the reply, and a second scroll was thrust in front of him.

Then, after a second came a third. But now the devil had no more.

"You've forgotten something," Luther shouted victoriously.

"Quickly write on each of them, 'The blood of Jesus Christ God's Son cleanses us from all sins.' "

Church, we were--are still-- all sinners; we didn't deserve his love; we didn't qualify for the invitation; but Jesus paid the price for all of us.

Our God is so extravagant and lavish that he even gave only son Jesus to the world so that you and I can come home and join the party.

But this party is not just for us; it is for all—all people, all human beings, all God's people, all men and women, and people of all culture. As a church, we are here to enjoy that love, to respond to that love, to witness to the love, to share that love with one another.

But not just in this place only; not just when we are well and happy, not just when our mood is right, not just when things are going the way we want, but all the time and everywhere.

God showed us his love first in an extravagant way. He is good not just when we are good; He is still good when we are not good and well.

May this love continue to be overflowing in our daily lives so that people out there can also feel the same through us. Amen.