

4th Sunday of Lent

March 27, 2022

St. Luke 15:1-3, 11-32

“To Make Alive”

- I. Wasted Living. (vv. 11-16)
- II. The Necessary Confession. (vv 17-19)
- III. The Incomprehensible Love of God.
- IV. The Issue Is *To Make Alive*.

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St. Luke 15:1-3, 11-32

Dear Friends in Christ,

Our text for this morning, *The Parable of the Prodigal Son*, is the third of three parables in St. Luke 15 addressed to the spiritually lost. The first two verses of Luke 15 reads, "Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him. And the Pharisees grumbled, saying, 'This man receives sinners and eats with them.'" (Lk. 15:1,2)

The tax collectors were sinners, too. They're listed separately since the Jews hated them and considered them traitors because tax collectors were Jews working for the Roman government. The tax collectors and sinners were all people, people who had heard Jesus and were drawn to him. They were those looking for the love of God. There were many looking for some sort of miracle.

Next, "...the Pharisees and scribes grumbled, saying, 'This man receives sinners and eats with them.'" (v.2) The Pharisees were religious leaders who saw themselves as deserving of God's love. They saw themselves as "somebodies" until the grave grabbed them by the ankles.

Jesus is *on the way to Calvary* for sinners. He's on the way . . .

TO MAKE ALIVE

I. Wasted Living. (vv. 11-16)

And he said, "there was a man who had two sons. And the younger of them said to the Father, 'Father, give me the share of property that is coming to me.' And he divided his property between them. Not many days later, the younger son gathered all he had and took a journey into the far country, and there he squandered his property in reckless living... and he began to be in need. So he hired himself out to one of the citizens...who sent him out into his field to feed pigs. And he was longing to be fed with the pods that the pigs ate, and no one gave him anything. (vv.11-16)

The younger son is a picture of those who were blessed with a Godly home but throw it aside for pursuit of the "far country...reckless living." "Prodigal" is defined as "rashly or wastefully extravagant." We've seen it here: confirmation ends, the child grows up, leaves the home and everything turns to "what I can get out of this world." It's the "here today, gone tomorrow" syndrome.

II. The Necessary Confession. (vv. 17-19)

"But when he came to himself, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have more than enough bread, but I perish here with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, 'Father I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants.'" (vv.17-19)

This is a penetrating truth much of this world and church avoid: "I have sinned against heaven and you." To confess that tears into our self-esteem. It tears into the gross idol worship of much of the church today that creates a god that will comply to what people demand. It hits with the clearest Scripture: "None is righteous, no not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one." (Rm. 3:10-12)

The confession of our sin before heaven is not an option. To ignore and find offense in such confession is to turn God's ear away from our cries for help and understanding, as the Psalmist writes, "If I had cherished iniquity in my heart, the Lord would not have listened. (Ps, 66:18) It marks us as liars: "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us." (1 Jn. 1:8) It leaves us in the following state now and forever: "...dead in (our) trespasses and sin." (Eph. 2:1)

Some of us are familiar with the comedian from generations ago, W.C. Fields. The story goes that not too long before his death a friend visited him in the hospital. When he entered Fields' room he was quite surprised to find Fields looking through the Bible. He asked him what he was doing with the Bible. Fields answered, "I'm looking for loopholes." That's the problem for many today; looking for loopholes. But there are none! It means what God says. And if that's straight with us, then look where it takes us . . .

III. The Incomprehensible Love of God.

"And he arose and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. And the son said to him, 'Father I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' But the father said to his servants, 'Bring quickly the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet. And bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate. For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.' And they began to celebrate." (vv.20-24)

This takes us to the incomprehensible love of God. It lifts the heart: "But while he was a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion...". He was looking for his son. It appears that his looking was every day. And that looking was accompanied by a sincere longing. And when he saw his son he "felt compassion, and ran to his son, embraced him and kissed him." The father saw him, was there...waiting. He did not re-hash the son's sin. He did not go through a list and a warning.

This is a most dramatic picture of God's love for the repentant heart. He sees what's inside each person here. He sees what we think is the least offensive thought! He sees the messes we've made, the sadness and guilt, the longing to be in the right relationship with our Father - in Heaven! And so, the son spoke the confession he planned to make, and look at what happened:

"And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' But the father said to his servants...let us celebrate.

That is it! It's over!! No walk down memory lane. No threats. When the deep roots we plant on this earth start pulling us away from the Lord, when sin and guilt turn to deep sorrow, when life grabs and turns inside out, hold on to this from Scripture: "Behold, it was for my welfare that I had great bitterness; but in love you delivered my life from the pit of destruction, for you have cast all my sins behind your back." (Is. 38:17) For the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ, God no longer sees our sins. And remember this: "I, I am he who blots out your transgressions for my own sake, and I will not remember your sins." (Is. 44:25)

At the beginning of this sermon we were informed from St. Luke's Gospel, "and the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, 'This man receives sinners and eats with them.'" (v.2b) "This man" was God in the flesh. And God would say to them, "...I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance." (Lk. 15:7)

IV. The Issue Is To Make Alive.

I know, what about the older son who, as our text stated, "...was angry and refused to go in"? (v.28) He refused to go in to the celebration. He refused because, as he insisted, "...these many years I have served you...you never gave me a young goat, that I might celebrate with my friends." He considered himself more deserving of his Father's love - a better person than his brother. He was along the line of the Pharisees: self-righteous.

“But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him!’ And (the father) said to him, ‘Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. It was fitting to celebrate and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive, he was lost, and is found.” (v. 30-32)

Maybe, sometimes, it’s too easy to forget: “None is righteous, no, not one...All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one.” (Rm. 3:10-11) The truth is, no-one here is better than another, including those outside this sanctuary. And no-one outside is better than anyone else.

The truth is we “were by nature children of wrath.” (Eph. 2:3b) We “were dead in the trespass and sin in which (we) once walked.” (Eph. 2:1,2) The truth is, “If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.” (I Jn. 1:8) We were dead - would never see the eternal love and light of the Triune God. But, as the Holy Spirit says, “But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.” (I Jn. 1:7)

He’s on the way to Calvary, **To Make - us - Alive.**

Amen.

Pastor Bill Abbott