

Luke 15: 1-3, 11-32

Now all the tax-collectors and sinners were  
coming near to listen to him.

And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying,  
“This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them.”

So he told them this parable:

There was a man who had two sons.

The younger of them said to his father,

“Father, give me the share of the property that will belong to me.”

So he divided his property between them.

A few days later the young son gathered all he had and  
travelled to a distant country,

and there he squandered his property in dissolute living.

When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that  
country, and he began to be in need.

So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who  
sent him to his fields to feed the pigs.

He would gladly have filled himself with the pods  
that the pigs were eating; and no one gave him anything.

But when he came to himself he said,

“How many of my father’s hired hands have bread enough and  
to spare, but here I am dying of hunger!

I will get up 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 like one of your hired hands.’

So he set off and went to his father.

But while he was still far off,

his father saw him and was filled with compassion;  
he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him.  
Then 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 slaves,  
“Quickly, bring out a robe—the best one—and put it on him;  
put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet.  
And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate;  
for this son of mine was dead and is alive again;  
he was lost and is found!” And they began to celebrate.

Now his elder son was in the field;  
and when he came and approached the house,  
he heard music and dancing.  
He called one of the slaves and asked what was going on.  
He replied, “Your brother has come,  
and your father has killed the fatted calf,  
because he has got him back safe and sound.”  
Then he became angry and refused to go in.  
His father came out and began to plead with him.  
but he answered his father, “Listen!  
For all these year I have never disobeyed your command;  
yet you have never given me even a young goat  
so that I might celebrate with my friends.  
But when this son of yours came back,  
who has devoured your property with prostitutes,  
you killed the fatted calf for him!”

Then the father said to him,

**“Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours.  
But we had to celebrate and rejoice,  
because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life;  
he was lost and has been found.”**

### **Meditation**

**Now, don't raise your hand, this a private question,  
but which character in the parable do you identify with?  
Do you have more in common with the younger, wayward son or to the older  
brother who stayed home being the 'good' son only to find himself resentful  
and angry.  
Or perhaps you saw a bit of each in yourself depending upon the  
circumstances!**

**Now, next question, again a private question:  
did anyone identify with the Father?  
Whaaat? You might be thinking?  
Isn't the Father meant to represent God?  
Wouldn't it be more than a little arrogant  
to think we could identify with the Holy One?  
maybe yes...maybe no.**

**Our reading today includes, quite openly, a parable.  
It says so right at the beginning.  
So this isn't a real story about a real family,  
but a story that Jesus tells to shake people up out of complacency and**

**same old, same old thinking.**

**And while Jesus was telling this parable to the tax collectors, sinners, Scribes and Pharisees the Parable is also a teaching about the nature of God.**

**Only most of the time, we acknowledge what a great guy the Father was and then ignore him...**

**But let's do something different today. Let's look at what Jesus wanted us to know about the God he intimately knew, the Abba God he gave his life for.**

**In the Christian Tradition, a lot of people don't think God, at least God the Father, is a great guy.**

**That's what people tell me when they say they prefer to pray to the Spirit, or to Jesus...a lot of Christians are hung up on the picture of the violent vengeful God that is sometimes represented in the Old Testament. I've heard lots of people say, they don't like the Hebrew Scriptures precisely for that reason. (that's another whole different conversation!)**

**Yet, we often forget that the Hebrew Scriptures, the Old Testament were the Scriptures of Jesus and that he was a Jew to the day that he died.**

**Now, not to necessarily single out just Christianity.. but, I would think it is safe to say that most of humanity, has grown up believing we needed to obey certain rules so that whichever god we believe in would be happy with us and**

then we would reap the rewards:  
our enemies would be defeated,  
our crops would flourish,  
our illnesses would be cured,  
our sorrows could be avoided  
and we would go to heaven (if our tradition believed in heaven) after we die,

But of course we all know life rarely works out like that.

All of these beliefs quid pro quo beliefs:  
if I'm good I'll be rewarded, if I'm bad I'll be punished,  
rest on a particular image or understanding of God.

In the Christian tradition because of art and story,  
language and cultural norms,  
very often God is thought to be a male and white and older...  
and this God sits up on a throne watching  
what goes on down below on Earth....  
and this God decides who is good enough and who is not..  
this God needs to be noticed and appeased and praised.  
This God could forgive your disobedience if you asked,  
grant your prayers, if you prayed them the 'right way'  
and this God didn't hesitate to punish the wrong doers forever..

There a lots of problems with this God  
beginning with the fact that this particular image of God  
or understanding of God  
is not the God of Jesus...  
and we can see that in our parable today.

**The Father in today's parable,  
challenges all those kind of religious expectations of who and what God is.**

**Rather than a God who sits distant and waits for his subjects to humbly  
approach him...**

**Jesus offers us a picture of God who is watching for us, waiting for us  
and when God sees us approaching,  
the God of Jesus runs towards us with open arms,  
even before we say a word...**

**Rather than a God who expects obedience in order to get a reward,  
Jesus offers us a picture of God who is who offers us everything,  
simply and only because we are so amazingly loved.**

**If we believe that Jesus is the visible image of the invisible God,  
then we are being offered radically different images of who God is  
rather than who we have been taught that God is.**

**According to theologian Brian McLaren (and I want to quote him directly  
because I can't say it better than he can)**

**...the God imaged by Jesus exerts no dominating supremacy.**

**In Christ, we see an image of a God who is not armed with lightning bolts but  
with basin and towel,  
who spewed not threats but good news for all,  
who rode not a war horse, but a donkey, weeping in compassion  
for people who do not know the way of peace.**

**In Christ, God is supreme, but not in the old discredited paradigm of  
supremacy: God is the supreme healer, the supreme friend, the supreme  
lover, the supreme life-giver who self –empties in gracious love for all.**

**The king of kings and lord of lords is the servant of all and**

**the friend of sinners. The so-called weakness and foolishness of God are greater than the so-called power and wisdom of human regimes.**

**If indeed we believe that we are made in the image and likeness of God, then we are called to allow ourselves to be transformed into one who heals, loves, befriends and self-empties for the good of others.**

**If indeed we believe that we are made in the image and likeness of God, then we are called to be like the Father in our story, that even when with those we love the most, make the most unloving demands, do the most unloving things, and have the most unloving expectations, we are called to love them, just as they are.**

**This isn't the way of the world.**

**This isn't the way most people or the way most gods, for that matter, are expected to act.**

**but this is the way of Jesus and his God.**

**We are offered unconditional love  
and we are to offer unconditional love.**

**I'll admit it, often times I have a hard time with this.**

**a lot more than I care to admit, I have some, a lot? a few?**

**expectations and requirements**

**that on some level, I expect to be fulfilled before I will love you...**

**And there are times we need to hold healthy boundaries for our own safety:  
physical as well as emotional,**

but do we draw those boundaries more frequently than we need to?  
and even if we need to, could we possibly still love them even if we cannot be  
in relationship with them?

**Remember: we are not talking about romantic love,  
but the desire that everyone finds their highest good...**

When we find hard to love unconditionally and think it is beyond our ability  
to do so, that is when we are invited to look inwards not with self judging and  
self condemning thoughts about how we ought to be better,  
but we are invited to look inward  
with the unconditionally loving gaze of the Holy One.

You see...it is not we who love...It is the Divine in us who loves the Divine in  
us and in them...we simply attempt not throw up any blockades to the flow of  
Divine Love.

The presence of the Divine Mystery is already and always has been  
in every human person, in every piece of created reality.

When we look inside with open hearts,  
we will find wisdom, strength, courage, compassion, and LOVE  
being offered to us and we then we can let it flow with joy and gratitude!

We will know that we do not walk this life alone...

We will know that we have the presence of this most Amazing, most  
mysterious and most loving God already holding us, and saying:

‘welcome home...I love you!’

and then we shall simply whisper, “thank you!” amen.

