

“And Now The Rest Of The Story”

Luke 15:1-3, 11-32

Today, we get to hear probably the most well-known parable in all of Scripture – the parable of the “Prodigal Son.” The first half of this story is one that even most pagans have heard. The prodigal son returning is applied to many situations. ESPN loves to use this metaphor when an athlete changes teams and then returns to play where he once did. If the Los Angeles Angels with Albert Pujols came back to play the Cardinals in St. Louis, I assure you, some newspaper would have the headline: “The Prodigal Son Returns.”

People know the story. At least, they know the first half of the story, but they don't know the rest of the story. In the first half of the story, the younger son tells his father, “I wish you were dead,” and demands his inheritance. It sounds unbelievable to think that a child could say this or even think this, but that is essentially what he said. It seems unbelievable. Then the other day, I saw an interview with Dave Mustaine, the lead singer for the band Megadeth. Megadeth has the bass player Dave Ellefson who is studying to be an LCMS pastor. Dave Mustaine also, now confesses to be a Christian. However, in the interview, he was asked what his childhood was like. He said, “It was all I could do to not kill my parents.” Their first album was entitled “Killing is My Business. . . . And Business is Good.”

Lately, I have been trying to more deeply understand the Heavy Metal music culture. You probably do not realize how huge this is. About 20% of all record sales would be classified as Heavy Metal. That is one in five. So much of the music is filled with anger, rage, and violence.

Many will tell you that the music is a catharsis – it allows you to vent your emotion so you don't explode. I suppose it serves the same purpose as watching a movie like "Beaches" does for certain women that I know. (Now I am imagining a bunch of "headbangers" watching "Beaches" and shedding a tear). That kind of makes me laugh.

I understand the value of a catharsis. My investigation into heavier music is not purely for academic reasons. There are certain bands whose music I can truly appreciate. I have certain heavier or even depressingly themed music which I have used as a catharsis for many years. I get it. The challenge has been to find music that does not abuse my ears with the verbal crutch of profanity.

And I do not listen to the Heavy Metal music where you can't understand the words and the vocals are simply another percussion instrument. But the heavier music I do find interesting or even really enjoyable tends to have a common theme. They tend to understand the guilt of sin and the reality of the Law. And you hear that in this music more so than you do in other styles.

Now I am not promoting or advocating listening to heavy secular music. Certain bands mock God and have names like Lamb of God, Testament – the lead singer of the band Exodus says that he likes to sing about killing people, Norwegian Black Metal bands are notorious for being

anti-Christian, Satanists, and openly hostile to the Lutheran Church in Norway and advocating burning churches down.

And in all the music in this genre, there is a struggle for the Christian to hear the Gospel, because it's not there. Not just the Satan-worship crowd, which, in reality is pushed more as a promotional scheme by the record companies than anything else – which speaks to the entire industry.

However, anything that does not honor God, the reality is that it honors Satan. That we cannot forget. Take the original Heavy Metal band, Black Sabbath, and listen to their first two albums, I never really listened to their later stuff, and they play some scary music. But they understand the Law. And the scary part of their music is that they play songs about being dragged into the fires of hell. Satan is not a hero in their songs. However, Jesus is not their hero either. There is no hero. There is no hope for salvation in their words. When there is no hope, that is when fear takes hold. There is nothing more frightening than to be completely without hope.

Last week I said that we cannot be silent when those around us hold false views of God. Those who see no hope in Christ hold a false view of God. The younger son in the parable was an ancient world headbanger who rebelled against his father, wished him to be dead, and packed his bags for “Los Angeles” – not to play baseball, but to hit the drug scene on Sunset Strip.

This is huge mission field. The Heavy Metal culture is much like the Gentile world into which Paul led his mission work. Paul went preaching to the tattooed, foul-mouthed pagans. And the Holy Spirit brought them to faith.

So back to the story, the son then takes his inheritance and blows it faster than your average NBA player. The average NBA player is bankrupt less than five years after their basketball career ends. Our sinful nature has not improved over the years. It never will. Like the headbangers listening to Black Sabbath, the younger son feels like he is being dragged into hell with no hope. A Jewish man is tending pigs – an unclean animal. Touching them makes him unclean. He is so desperate and without hope; he would even eat the slop out of their trough.

The Law has brought him low. We all know how the first half of this story ends. His father has compassion on him, embraces him, kisses him. The Father brings shame and humiliation upon himself: He ran to him. Children and thieves run. Men of honor do not run. And he embraces this ceremonially unclean tender of pigs – who from a hygiene perspective was undoubtedly unclean also; and he covers him in his best robe; and he puts the signet ring on his finger as a sign that he is once again part of this family.

This is how God works. In an act of compassion, God humiliates Himself hanging naked on the cross, takes away our uncleanness, washes it away in Baptism, and covers us in His robe of righteousness. That is a great first half of the story. But I have always struggled with the second half of the story, with the rest of the story, because the other brother reminds me too much of me. Amen