

“Welcome Home”

Luke 15:1-3a, 11-32

In this section of Luke where our Gospel lesson is found, Luke records a number of parables, most of which are not found in the other Gospels. In these parables, there are several themes that flow through them. Jesus warns us of the danger of misusing our possessions, and Jesus tells us of the great mercy of God our Father.

Starting in Luke 12 we hear from the Rich Fool who thought that he could “take life easy; eat, drink, and be merry.” Later in that same chapter, Jesus tells us to store up treasure in heaven rather than worrying about treasures on earth. In Chapter 13, we hear that the first shall be last and the last shall be first. In Chapter 14, we hear the parable of the Great Banquet where the wealthy people with better things to do rejected the invitation, so the poor, the lame, and every dreg off the street is invited.

Following today’s Gospel lesson, in Luke 16, is the parable of the Unrighteous Steward and the story of the Rich Man and Lazarus.

Framed within this context is the story of the Prodigal Son. This is a parable that is well-known to us all. The younger of two sons takes his share of the family fortune and squanders it living a wild lifestyle.

According to Jewish Law, what the younger son did was not unheard

of. It was a son's right to demand his inheritance even before the father was dead. The son's inheritance would be a lesser percentage than the full inheritance to which he would be entitled at the death of his father, but he could have it right now.

In asking for his inheritance, the son was telling the father more than just that he wanted his money. In asking for his inheritance, he was essentially saying, "I wish you were dead, and I do not care to be your son any longer." So the younger son takes his lesser inheritance and lives a wild, care-free life: until the money runs out.

This is not just the story of some foolish Hebrew boy. This is our story. Our sinful nature says, "Take the money and run. We don't need our Father in heaven as long as we have some bucks in our pocket." Adam rejected the Father in the Garden of Eden and sought after a lesser inheritance. Our sinful nature is the result of God's son, Adam, rebelling against his heavenly Father and renouncing the Father/son relationship with which he was no longer content. He wanted to be like God.

Our sinful nature wishes that God were dead. Then there would be no consequences. We could do whatever we wanted. Our popular culture says, "That is the ultimate lifestyle. Do whatever you want, and don't worry about tomorrow." But tomorrow always comes – unless God demands your life of you that day. The lesser inheritance cannot last. It will always run out, because God is not dead. The Father lives. The good news is that no matter how poorly we have mistreated Him in the past, just like the father in

the parable, our Father loves us very much.

After the younger son had rejected his relationship as a son, after he had wasted part of his life on that lesser inheritance, and debased himself in every way, he knew that his only hope was his father's goodness and mercy. The younger son knew that his father was not vindictive and spiteful. He knew that his father did not hold grudges. He knew that his father was merciful and kind. So he goes home.

Now the son thought that the most that he can ask is to become one of the Father's hired servants so he would at least not starve to death. Reality had set in. Without his father providing for him, he was going to die. He knew that he had sinned. He said, "I am no longer worthy to be called your son." And he was right. He had rejected the ways of the father, he had rejected their relationship, and he wanted to be his own authority. "I am going to do whatever I want."

This is what happened in the Garden of Eden, and this is still what our sinful nature wants. When I look deep into my heart, I know that I want to be my own boss. As I said last week, none of us deserve to be called the children of God, yet we are.

In the parable, the father ran out to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him. Then the father had a celebration in his honor, and once again called him "My son."

This is also the story of our life. When you were still off in the distance, He ran out to you, threw His arms around you and said, "You were once

dead. Now you are alive. And you are my true child.”

Ironically, our rebirth and renewal is a direct result of our sinful nature’s deepest, darkest wish coming true. God did die, and because of that death, He does not look upon our sins any more. Like the prodigal son, we have not deserved this. And it is our natural inclination to think like the younger son and believe that the way to get back in good graces with the Father is to work as a servant and try to show our merit through our good works. But God doesn’t deal with us like that. Whatever we have received from our Father is a free, undeserved gift.

God receives us because He loves us and cares for us. Whatever work that we do for our Father, whatever good works we might do during our lifetime flows from the loving relationship between God our Father and His beloved children.

Even though we have wasted parts of our lives chasing after that lesser inheritance, and have sinned in every way against our Father in heaven, we know that our only hope is in His goodness and mercy. Like the younger son, we know that our Father is not vindictive or spiteful. We know that our Father does not hold grudges. We know that our Father is merciful and kind.

We are truly blessed to have been called away from the lesser inheritance that the world offers (which is really no inheritance at all.) It is not lasting. We have been welcomed home. And we will dwell in our Father’s House forever. Amen.