

Gaines Congregational United Church of Christ

March 27, 2022

Old Testament Reading; Joshua 5: 9-12

Responsive Reading; Psalm 32

Epistle Reading; 2 Corinthians 5: 16-21

Gospel Reading; Luke 15: 1-3, 11b-32

Sermon Title:

ARE YOU THE PRODIGAL' S BROTHER?

By Rev. Jim Gardner

Summary; We should not be envious of what someone else has when what we have is even better.

Today's Gospel is very familiar to us and has been the subject of sermons since the birth of Christianity.

Usually the message has had something to do with trying to get us to avoid the selfishness of the prodigal son and/or to marvel at the forgiving compassion of the father, to realize that this father is the living example of what our God is to all of us and how we should try to reflect this quality in how we forgive

others. These are great messages in their own right but I am going a little deeper today.

Let's get started with the Old Testament lesson. In that lesson the Hebrews had just entered the promised land near Jericho. The Hebrews had been living on the Manna of the Lord for forty years in the wilderness. On this day they celebrated Passover for the first time in forty years and the manna stopped but they got to eat of the fruits of the promised land for the first time, as they would from that time forward.

God will always provide. Maybe it will not be the ideal meal but it will be there. Remember that at one point the disgruntled wanderers called the Manna, "This worthless bread". God had supplied manna until He supplied the "first fruits". God had always come through, and He still does.

Our Psalm reading tells us that when we get off our high-horse and confess our shortcomings that God will forgive our sins and will provide a, "hiding place" for us. He will lead us if we are not so stubborn as to need a bit in our mouths as horses and mules do. "Many sorrows shall be to the wicked; But he who trusts in the Lord, mercy shall surround him."

In our Epistle lesson, Paul says that Christ has made everything new. Because Jesus who knew no sin became sin, we who were all sin became righteousness. We are no longer allowed to view others as of the flesh but as God does as potential children of

God. This is not an act of us but rather an act of God. We are reconciled to God to be ambassadors. Jesus has given us the ministry of reconciliation so that all men might become the righteousness of God in Jesus Christ. Hey! No pressure here.

Now comes the biggie. The parable of the prodigal son.

This story has so many twists and turns that it must have put every nerve of the religious elite right on edge. First the younger son has the gaul to say, "Dad, if you are not going to hurry up and die, at least split up your belongings so I can get a head start on your death." Next atrocity, the father actually does it. Wow! Unheard of. Now comes the part we as parents could have foretold, the foolish kid totally blows his financial fortune and becomes a beggar feeding pigs to survive. He now realizes how foolish he has been and goes back to his father, totally humbled and asks dad to take him back as a servant.

Notice at this point the bible said that the father saw him while he was still a long way off. Parents do not disown their children for messing up. Parents anxiously watch their children, looking for a sign that the kid is coming to his or her senses. The same is true with this dad. Dad does not even let the kid finish his speech when he sends his servants to get a robe, a ring and sandals for the kid. Oh, and by the way, kill the fatted calf and let's have a party.

Now comes the point of today's message. The older brother of the prodigal son. I think that probably we all identify with this character more than any other in the parable. It seems to us that this guy has a legitimate gripe. He did not go off and party, and raise hell, and enjoy all the despicable benefits of the selfish. He stayed on the farm and worked hard at maintaining the business. This son looks around him at the world and sees what the hymn, "Once to Every Man and Nation", says, "though the cause of evil prospers ...". It seems that the bad guys get all the goodies.

We do this to this day. It seems that the scoundrels live the life we envy while we lack all of those most attractive things. They drive that BMW or Mercedes Benz. They live in that five-million-dollar house with a view. They have the attention of the masses and teach us what coveting is all about. We, like the older brother don't think that it is fair.

What we do not seem to comprehend is what the father says to his eldest son. "Son, you are always with me and all that I have is yours." This son is not going to go bankrupt and have to feed pigs, because dad is with him. Also, dad says that everything he has will belong to the son. Now picture God saying this to you. You are in a safe place and you will always have all the things that you really need. You will never have a pricy car totaled by some drunk driver that runs a stop sign. You will never have

your house go up in flames in a southern California wild fire or drop into a sink hole in Florida. You will never have a terrorist or scam artist deprive you of your fortune or a jealous false witness destroy your good name and reputation. When God is your fortune you do not need a safe. No moth can eat or rust destroy or thief break in and steal. You are and always will be safe and secure in you loving father's arms.

Don't be envious of what someone else has when what we have is better.

Money in and of itself is not a bad thing. The problem comes when we like what it buys more than we love God who actually provides everything that money can buy. Do not build up for yourself riches on earth but rather build up your relationship with God the Father, Jesus the Son and the Holy Spirit the umbilical cord that connects us to eternity.

With this we are the richest people on the planet, Hallelujah and Amen!