

January 30, 2022

Texts: Micah 7:18-20, Luke 15: 11b-32

Title: The Parable of the Prodigal Son: Tying it all Together

Thank yous are in order to all of our children and young people for your sharing of this, one of Jesus' most famous stories. And thank you Trena, who wrote the script for this. Jesus' stories are never just about the story. Every story he told is an introduction to God's heart. If you've ever wanted to know what God is like, then this story is for you. In this case, we need to look at who Jesus' audience is. He was very careful to choose the right story for the right audience. His goal was to draw people closer to God. In this case, he was speaking to the religious leaders who criticized Jesus for spending time with what they called, "...the tax collectors and sinners." So he told them this story about the son who messed up really bad, shamed his family, and left home with half of dad's money and blew it all.

What's this story tell us about God. For one thing, the message is, "**God welcomes you.**" You are important to God. God accepts people. He doesn't want them to stay in their sins, of course, but he begins by accepting where people are.

There's healing in acceptance. We struggle today as it's always been, to just accept and love people as they are. A wealthy philanthropist once asked Mother Teresa if there was anything he could do to help her work...thinking that she would hit him up for a donation to her ministry and he was happy to oblige but this is what she said to him, "Find somebody nobody else loves and love them." Now I

think we could guess that in many cases, someone who is not loved by anyone is likely a person who has done a lot of people wrong in their lives.

God is like the father in that story who welcomed his son with open arms. He wants to welcome those who've gone astray. And God welcomes but also, **like the father in the story, God waits. God is waiting**, waiting for you, perhaps.

Dogs are like that, aren't they? They will wait by the door for hours for their master to return. And when he does, they are so excited to see him that, in one case, the dog forced the door open and he raced out to greet his master before he even got out of the car.

And the father didn't wait for his son to make the long journey to his doorstep. He didn't wait for him to repent or apologize. He raced out to meet him and hugged him and kissed him.

Well, here's some good news today. God is never giving up on you or me! We are accepted. We're loved. We're welcomed and we are waited for. That was the message of Jesus' life and the motivation for his death—to show us that God would give everything He has to save us and restore us and bring us home again. Can we trust our lives to a God like that? You bet! If you've been off the track for awhile with your life. And I think we generally will at least admit it to ourselves, I pray that today is the day that you come back and come home to the God who is running to meet you with open arms. Amen.