

A Story of Two

Fourth Sunday of Lent – Luke 15: 1-3,11-32

The story of the prodigal son is the story of two different brothers, two different truths (human and divine) and it is the story of two possible ways of living life.

I think this particular story is beautifully written. It pulls me in, making me believe that I am part of the drama that is unfolding. There is the generous and loving father. There is the oldest, dutiful son. And then there is the younger wayward, selfish, “do it my own way” child. Personally, I can relate to every character because I have been every one of them at some point in my life.

Yet, the story is more than the telling of a human experience. This is a divine tale, written to help us understand that God is a personal and loving deity who wants one thing. That one thing is to be in right relationship with each one of us.

“Tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to listen to Jesus, but the Pharisees and the scribes began to complain, saying, This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.” Here in lies the truth. Jesus, the Son of God, sits at table with those no one wants to associate with. Jesus feeds the needs of the least and the lowly, the outcast and the sinner.

To illustrate his point, Jesus tells the story of two. He tells of the younger son who **“collected all his belongings and set off to a distant country where he squandered his inheritance on a life of dissipation.”** Jesus also tells the story of the faithful older son who, after finding out about his brother’s return, challenges his father saying, **“Look, all of these years I served you and not once did I disobey your orders; yet you never gave me even a young goat to feast on with my friends.”** The story includes two responses to the father. The younger son returns home and begs for mercy. The older one has a different initial response. He responds with jealousy and anger. The interesting fact about this gospel parable is that we actually don’t know the older son’s final response to the situation. We don’t hear if he joined the party or remained estranged from the mercy and reconciliation that was offered.

To me, the mercy of God is an opportunity open to each and every person. We can respond to God, seeking God’s mercy and, in turn, showing the mercy and reconciliation necessary to carry on our relationships. Or we can reject God’s love and mercy.

This parable is the story of two different ways of living our lives. Which way is life-giving? Which way leads us into our own self-inflicted form of dissipation? The story of the prodigal son illustrates vividly the intersection between the human and the divine, providing us a poignant way to live out both truths (human and divine) in the spirit of mercy.

Happy Lent!
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