

## Lent 4 2022

Luke 15:11-32 Father and two sons

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Brief reflections on the Gospel of the day

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Context is 15:1-2.

Tax collectors and sinners are listening to Jesus (Word) and eating with him (Sacrament). The Scribes and Pharisees are complaining.

Three reflections.

### **Shame and guilt**

The younger son 'comes to himself'. He comes to his senses – he 'sees' his situation. Although he prepares a nice repentance speech (which he never gets to deliver), perhaps in the interests of getting a good meal, can we imagine his shame – his sense of failure and humiliation (feeding pigs and not even having a good meal himself. His employer treats the pigs better than him).

Have we ever had a situation when life collapses around us and we've felt useless and small?

The Father's response the younger son is not 'forgiveness in response to guilt'. It is reconnection of relationship in response to shame/humiliation'. The symbolism of ring, robe and feast.

### **Meritocracy and grace**

The older son stands outside the party fuming. The overarching feeling we hear is resentment. Perhaps the same kind of resentment that Cain experiences towards Abel when he perceives that Abel is getting favourable treatment from God. That situation resulted in murder.

The older son's resentment is rooted in a complete misreading of his relationship with the Father. He is, in fact, graced with 'everything' (all that the Father has) and yet he can only see himself as a victim.

Have we ever had a situation where we found ourselves grizzling and griping about how others were getting more favourable treatment than us, and thereby overlooked the incredible abundance of our circumstances.

The Father's response to the older son is to help him to see that the Father's relationship with the son is not a meritocracy. He doesn't have to earn anything. Everything he has is gift. (As Paul observes in 1 Corinthians 3:21)

We are left hanging in this story. Does the Older Son stay outside in the field of self-imposed moping (what Matthew often refers to as the 'outer darkness where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth. Or does he join the party? We don't know.

### **Insight from the bottom**

And finally we have the slave – the one who I have never yet heard a sermon preached about. He is the one who sees the Father's actions clearly and needs to explain it to the Older Son. Only the slave perceives the Father's true character and intent.

Could it be that the almost overlooked slave be a 'figure' of Christ in this story? The only one who knows the will of the Father? It often seems to be that people at the bottom of the heap are the ones with the most striking insights into God. Perhaps it's because they have so little to lose.