

Pride and Prejudice

Luke 15: 11- 32

March 14, 2010

I. Introduction

A. Ernest Hemingway once wrote a story about a father and his teenage son.

1. In the story, the relationship had become somewhat strained, and the teenage son ran away from home. His father began a journey in search of that rebellious son.

a. Finally, in Madrid, Spain, in a last desperate attempt to find the boy, the father put an ad in the local newspaper. The ad read: "Dear Paco, Meet me in front of the newspaper office at noon. All is forgiven. I love you. Your father."

2. The next day, in front of the newspaper office, eight hundred Pacos showed up.

a. They were all seeking forgiveness. They were all seeking the love of their father

A. It seems to me that story is a recognition of why the parable of the "Prodigal Son"

1. That we have seen and heard from our text this morning

a. Touches all of our hearts in some way or another

2. We are all "Pacos" at some time in our life, feeling lost and alone

a. Seeking for someone to love us and care about us

A. Perhaps we have never known the love of our heavenly father

1. Or, like the younger son in our scripture passage today

a. We have known what it is like to live in our Father's house

2. But our lives change, we run away, or maybe just drift away without even noticing

a. Until finally, we come to our senses and we realize how hungry we are

(1) We remember how we were fed and nourished, and loved

3. We long to return, to be forgiven, accepted, have everything made right again

a. But we believe that we are not deserving of such love

A. Or we may be like the older son in the parable, never straying far from "home"

1. But also never feeling the joy of being fully accepted and appreciated

A. And as a result, we may find it difficult to reach out to the "prodigals" around us

1. Perhaps even jealous of the grace that is so lovingly extended by our father

a. To persons that we may see as "undeserving" or beyond redemption

A. In any case, we may miss out on all that a loving father desires for our lives

1. Unless we are willing to let go of those things that keep us apart

a. Things that can damage and destroy our relationship with God, and with others

- A. There would be many attitudes or characteristics that fit in that category
 - 1. But for our message this morning, I have chosen two of those things -
 - a. Two attitudes that the sons in our scripture text had to deal with -
 - (1) And we may need to deal with sometimes, too - Pride and prejudice
 - b. With apologies to Jane Austin for borrowing the title from her book
- II. I found it interesting, this week, to think about this familiar story of a father and his sons
- A. In light of the sermon that Andy Stoner brought to us last Sunday
 - 1. Dealing with relationships between parents and their children
 - A. If you heard that message, you may be reminded of some of the points Andy made
 - 1. As we look at Jesus' story of rebellious sons and a forgiving father
 - A. We are also continuing in our Lenten season theme of "Holding On and Letting Go"
 - 1. Reminding us that there are promises and principles that we should hold on to
 - a. At the same time that we ask God to show us, through the power of the Holy Spirit
 - (1) The things in our life that we may need to let go of
 - A. The parable, or story, from Luke's gospel that we are looking at this morning
 - 1. Comes in the middle of a series of similar parables that Jesus told
 - A. It follows a story about a shepherd with 100 sheep; when one comes up missing
 - 1. The shepherd leaves the 99 sheep in order to search for the one that is lost
 - a. And throws a party to celebrate with his friends when the sheep is found
 - A. And a story about a woman who loses a valuable coin
 - 1. And even though she still has nine coins remaining, she goes to great lengths
 - a. To find the one that is missing; and she also calls up all her friends
 - (1) To share her joy when the lost coin is found
 - A. Both stories end with this thought – there is even more joy among the angels in heaven
 - 1. Over a lost sinner who repents and returns to God
 - A. And then, we come to our story, that's not about sheep or coins, but a son who is lost
 - A son who has gone away from his father, and wasted his share of the family's wealth
 - 1. And this story also has a good ending, when the son comes back home
 - a. And the father is joyful and throws a party to celebrate his return
 - A. It's a wonderful picture of God's grace and forgiveness
 - 1. The eagerness with which the father runs down the road to welcome the lost son
 - a. The wealth of blessings that are showered on prodigal
 - (1) Who was merely hoping for a position as a household servant

2. But I can't help but wonder, how would we feel about this parable
 - a. If it didn't turn out so well, if the son had failed to return
 - (1) If he had, heaven forbid, died in that faraway country
- A. And we have the older brother, the character that we don't like to think about so much

Because we might find ourselves to be a little too much like him

What was it that kept him from joining the celebration of his brother's return
- A. I believe it is between the lines that we find the real struggle in this story

For the younger son, who really just wanted to get away from home

 - a. Find out what life was like outside of the safety and protection of his father's care
 - (1) How many of us can identify with those feelings in some way or another
 2. And then, having discovered that the glitz and glamour faded rather quickly
 - a. This son is faced with a very real dilemma -
 - (1) Keep on fending for himself, even if it means a lifetime of slopping the hogs
 - (a) Or swallow his pride and return home
- A. If that seems like a pretty easy choice to make, it's probably because -
 1. You've never done something that everyone else could see was a bad choice
 - a. And you only came to that realization later
 2. Or you really, really enjoy feeding pigs...and I'm glad for people who do
 - a. Most of us would fit better in the first category
- A. Either we've gotten angry, or frustrated, or just fed up with the way things are going
 1. And we've spouted off without thinking, or we've made a poor decision
 - a. Without considering the possible outcomes
 2. Maybe we are the one that ends up getting hurt by it
 - a. Sometimes, perhaps even most of the time, someone else is hurt, too
 - (1) Certainly God's heart is hurt when we say or do things that are not good
 3. And then, what do we do? Admit we were wrong? Apologize?
 - a. Try to make things right if we can?
 4. Or do we hold on to whatever pride we have left, blame our problems on somebody else, and keep right on going down the wrong path
- A. I think of the story of King David, who had an affair with another man's wife
 1. And then used all kinds of other deceitful practices to try to cover it up
 - a. When the prophet, Nathan, confronted him with his sin
 - (1) David immediately repented and asked God for forgiveness

(a) Not an easy thing for a king to do

- A. Or I think of Judas, who betrayed Jesus to the authorities who arrested him
 - 1. He eventually recognized his terrible mistake, but rather than own up to it
 - a. Judas took his own life, his pride cost him everything
- A. The younger son in Jesus' parable was faced with that same kind of situation
 - 1. It was easy to feel good about his decision as long as the money held out
 - a. But when he came to the end of his rope, he realized what a mistake he had made
 - 2. And then he had to decide, admit his foolishness, go back to his family and friends
 - a. Take on the role of a servant in his father's house – what a degrading thing to do
 - 3. Or tough it out, keep going his own way, even though it meant no friends
 - a. No place to call home, and not even enough food to eat
- A. Pride is not always that easy to see
 - 1. Sometimes, in our culture, we hear that we should never admit that we are wrong
 - a. It's better to take our lumps, accept the consequences of our choices
 - (1) But don't ever back down from doing things our own way
- A. Jesus offers an alternative – repent, turn around, and admit our mistakes
 - a. The people around us may not treat us so kindly
 - (1) And there may be consequences that we will have to live with
 - b. But there is forgiveness in coming home to the father
 - (1) Broken relationships can be mended, restored again
 - c. And there will be joy in the heavenly realm when the one who was lost is “found”
- A. Pride always destroys relationships; humility and forgiveness is the only remedy
 - 1. But, oh how hard it can be to let go of our pride
- A. The older son had a problem with pride, too, but in a different way
 - 1. He wasn't too proud to admit to his wrongdoing
 - a. It's just that he didn't believe he had ever done anything wrong
- A. And to prop up that belief, he could point to his younger brother, and say –
 - 1. Well, I've never done anything as bad as that!
 - a. I've stayed at home, worked hard for my father all these years
 - 2. If anyone deserves the blessing of my father, it would be me
 - a. Do you see why I call this a form of prejudice?
- A. Prejudice is whenever I put myself in a higher position than someone else
 - 1. Even when there may seem to be a very good reason for doing so

- A. And prejudice always damages relationships, too
 - 1. In this case, it kept the older son from enjoying the return of his brother
 - a. Can you imagine that these two ever got along well together after that?
 - (1) Not without some major work at restoring the relationship
 - 2. And it damaged the relationship between the older son and his father
 - a. For no reason at all except the son's refusal to let go of his pride
 - (1) And give up his feelings of superiority, his prejudice toward his own brother

- A. I have to check myself on this one frequently
 - 1. After all, I grew up in a good home, became a Christian at an early age
 - a. I've certainly not lived a perfect life, but I've done pretty well
 - 2. I live in a nice house, have a beautiful wife; I'm surrounded by respectable people
 - a. I have a position that is generally held in some respect
 - (1) Although preachers haven't always lived up to that expectation

- A. So, if anyone deserves God's mercy and blessing, I should be right near the top of the list
 - 1. See how easy it is for me to adopt the same attitude as this older son
 - a. And how hard it can be for me to relate to the "prodigals" down the street
 - 2. Not the literal street, mind you, don't start looking at my neighbors
 - a. To see who I might be talking about
 - 3. I'm talking about the people who have made the obvious "poor choices" in life
 - a. People who have traveled far from home, wasted their talents or abilities
 - (1) People who just wouldn't fit in with my respectable way of life
 - 4. And it's not that I wouldn't want them to come back to God, to be forgiven
 - a. To be welcomed by the Father...eventually
 - 5. But I'm the worthy son; let them come back as the humble servant

- A. You know what? I hear Jesus saying that if I don't recognize, and let go of
 - 1. My sense of pride and prejudice, those people will be welcomed into the house
 - a. While I am left standing out in the field, kept out there by my attitude
 - (1) While all heaven celebrates the return of those who recognize
 - (a) And admit their "lostness" and humbly turn to the father for forgiveness

- A. Jesus doesn't say that there is no hope for the older son
 - 1. The father reaches out to him at the end of the story, too
 - a. But we are left wondering what the final outcome will be

III. It's hard to read or hear this story and not ask ourselves – which character am I?

- A. Perhaps we can see a lot of the rebellious son in ourselves
 - 1. Knowing that we, too, have made wrong choices and decisions in our lives
 - a. And finding it hard to admit our wrongdoing
 - 2. Jesus says to us this morning – give me your pride, come back home
 - a. It may not mean that your life will be easy from that point on
 - (1) But God is waiting for you, running to meet you with open arms
 - b. As the saying goes – God gives second chances, and third and fourth, and more
 - (1) Thank God!!!
- A. Perhaps you see yourself in the position of the older son
 - 1. Unable to rejoice in the mercy that God shows to someone else
 - a. Because we refuse to accept our own need for that same mercy and love
 - 2. I believe Jesus would say to us – give up your prejudice
 - a. Come in and joy the celebration
- A. The really hard thing for me to do is to see myself in the place of the father
 - 1. Not that I am God – I get reminded of that from time to time
 - a. But we are called, as God’s people, to be transformed into the image of God
 - (1) To have the mind of Jesus, the same attitudes and ways of thinking
 - 2. And I believe Jesus is telling us something about what that means in this story
 - a. Because the father demonstrates what we can be like
 - (1) If we are willing to give up our pride and our prejudices
 - b. And welcome others with the same love and forgiveness
 - (1) That we have received from the one who is father of us all
- A. May God give us the courage to give up those things that would keep us apart
 - 1. And the conviction and grace to hold on to God’s love with one hand
 - a. As we extend our other hand in love to all those around us