

17th Sunday after Pentecost (11 September 2016)

Sermon Text: Luke 15: v1, 2 & 11-32

Sermon Theme:

We will consider the role of the brother of the prodigal son in today's sermon.

The parable of the prodigal son is a wonderful text that gives us many potential points to ponder.

We could consider the role of the father in the parable, the role of fathers in our families, or the role of our Heavenly Father above.

We could consider the role of the prodigal son, his choice and the freedom to leave his loving father, and then his decision to return home.

But, today I would like to explore the role of the brother, or as the New Jerusalem Bible states, "The **dutiful** Son".

When reading this parable, we should consider the context when Jesus told this parable. In v1 & v2, we read that the Pharisees and scribes complained that Jesus welcomed and shared meals with sinners and tax collectors. So Jesus told the "**dutiful**" Pharisees the parable of the son who had sinned. But Jesus also very cleverly included in the parable the "**dutiful**" son.

The key verse is v29 - As the father was busy preparing a feast to celebrate the return of his lost son, he urged his dutiful son to join them. But the dutiful son retorted angrily to his father:

"Look! All these years I've been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends.

Do we feel that he was justified in feeling angry?

Could we have responded the same way?

Is it fair that the son who squandered everything receives "a hero's welcome"?

Let us consider the two sons. The responsible dutiful son who was obedient and did the right things. And the wild child. The rebel. The son, who broke the rules, thought of himself and did his own thing.

Some families may have a similar situation. As a parent, when your child goes into the world on their own, will they be caught up with the temptations of alcohol, drugs, sex and wild parties? Remarkably, the father in our parable let his son go to discover the world. No doubt he had grave concerns if he would ever see his son again. Maybe we had similar experiences.

If we now consider the parable from a spiritual angle. We are baptised in Christ, many of us at a young age. As children, we go to Sunday school. We attend confirmation classes. We are active members of the congregation. We go to church every Sunday. And when we grow up, we leave our parents home, sometimes leave our home town, and we are faced with many choices. New friends. New churches. New activities on weekends. What do we do?

Like the prodigal son, do we put God on hold a bit so we can live life freely for a while? Have some fun. Or do we focus on our career. Or are we busy finding a partner and establishing our own family. If we go to church, maybe other church groups are more lively, more entertaining, more spiritual. When I came to UCT as a student, I visited various student religious groups.

But the responsible son in our parable stays in the safety of his spiritual home. He does not wander away. He goes to church every Sunday, as is expected from an obedient son. Surely that is commendable and right. Then why does he challenge his father with the words in anger “All these years I’ve been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends.” Can we ask WHY did the obedient son stay with his father which resulted in such an outburst?

Can we ask ourselves why do we go to Church every Sunday like the dutiful son?

And if someone is saved at the 11th hour, or if someone comes back after leading a sinful life, do we feel it unfair that they get special treatment from God and others. Like the angry workers in the vineyard in Mathew 20 who worked the whole day but were paid the same amount as the workers that came last.

So maybe this parable is not so much about the prodigal son who thought he could live without God, but more about the son who did.

Maybe we need to consider – are we like the dutiful son. And then we need to ask ourselves if we also feel angry if we did all the right things and the one who did not gets the reward. Do we also feel entitled to a small reward like the dutiful son?

Do we get angry with God if bad things happen to us but we lived good and dutiful lives?

I summarize it as follows:

The prodigal son had everything he needed at home, but he neither realised nor appreciated it. His father gave him the freedom to make mistakes and let him go.

The prodigal son thought that worldly riches and pleasures would make him happy. But he realised, that worldly treasures do not last.

The prodigal son realised that he needed to find his way back to the source of love and safety.

The prodigal son realised his grave mistake, he returned to his father, repented, and pleaded for forgiveness.

The father rejoiced that his lost son recognised the gift of love, life and safety. The father offered his son unconditional love and grace.

Let us not take the difficult route of leaving our Saviour and heavenly Father to realise what a remarkable gift we have.

But, let us also not believe only out of duty like the obedient son.

Let us recognise daily that our Lord is our Saviour through love and grace alone. We can never achieve anything in the eyes of God through duty and good works.

Let us use every opportunity to seek the Lord, hear His word, confess our transgressions, partake in His sacrament and praise His name in joyful song. Let us go and drink from the well with the living water that leads to eternal life, as we read in John 4v14.

Let us rejoice and celebrate every Sunday when we find ourselves back to the Lord's house, at His altar, together with all the children of God, with the dutiful and with those not so dutiful as we ought. God loves them too.

So in Conclusion

We have a Father in heaven who wants to share and give us eternal life. Let us embrace this gift every day and rejoice with a grateful heart. Let us be thankful for the many blessings we received from our heavenly Father, even though we do not deserve it.

There will be times when we do not feel the joy in our heart and soul. We are troubled by the pressures and issues in our life. But is that not the best time to find our special quiet space where we talk deeply with our Father in heaven to give us the strength we need.

There may be times when we come out of church and we feel the same as when we arrived. We may question why should we come at all. But, a phrase we hear can change everything. When we least expect it, a little miracle happens in our lives. Or even better, we can be that light when a stranger, a visitor or a trouble soul comes to visit us.

So let us rejoice and not complain if we meet the same faces next Sunday like the dutiful son, or a face we have not seen for way too long like the prodigal son.

The Father and the angels in heaven rejoice for everyone who comes back to the Father's house! Why should we complain?

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

Amen