



“Amazing Dad”

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Scripture (NRSV):

Luke 15:1-3, 11-32

1 Now all the tax collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to him. 2 And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, "This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them." 3 So he told them this parable:

11 "There was a man who had two sons. 12 The younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of the property that will belong to me.' So he divided his property between them. 13 A few days later the younger son gathered all he had and traveled to a distant country, and there he squandered his property in dissolute living. 14 When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that country, and he began to be in need. 15 So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs. 16 He would gladly have filled himself with the pods that the pigs were eating; and no one gave him anything. 17 But when he came to himself he said, 'How many of my father's hired hands have bread enough and to spare, but here I am dying of hunger! 18 I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; 19 I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands."' 20 So he set off and went to his father. But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him. 21 Then the son said to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son." 22 But the father said to his slaves, "Quickly, bring out a robe—the best one—and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. 23 And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; 24 for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!" And they began to celebrate. 25 "Now his elder son was in the field; and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. 26 He called one of the slaves and

asked what was going on. 27 He replied, "Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has got him back safe and sound.' 28 Then he became angry and refused to go in. His father came out and began to plead with him. 29 But he answered his father, "Listen! For all these years I have been working like a slave for you, and I have never disobeyed your command; yet you have never given me even a young goat so that I might celebrate with my friends. 30 But when this son of yours came back, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fatted calf for him!' 31 Then the father said to him, "Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. 32 But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found.' "

Sermon:

Let's get one thing straight right now: the sons of the father, and the father himself, were not poor folk, not by a stretch.

The father had land (property) in a time when most of the land had been consolidated in the hands of the ultra-rich elites. Most people worked the land, but they didn't own it. Jesus tells the story of the workers or the slaves who served the land and the landowners, over and over again, in a number of parables. But not here.

So, the daddy is a rich man. And he has two bratty sons.

When I start to think about this story I can get distance from it, because it sounds more like an English earl, with his lands and wealth and entitled children...than anything else I know.

I don't know anybody with big inheritances of land and business that they will pass on to their sons. Most of our kids just have to go out and get a job when they grow up.

So, I might have felt a safe distance from this story, but not for long.

I mean at first, that youngster is awful, and entitled. He is a brat, he wants money and fun, his pleasures, his satisfactions...and to hell with everyone else. He doesn't have the decency to wait til his father dies to receive his inheritance...he demands it, the nasty little piece of work that he is. It's as if he said to his dad; I wish you were dead so I could get my

hands on your money. And his father, puts up with it! Gives him what he wishes for...money for fun and dissolute living.

He “squanders” his inheritance, the text says. This is where the story starts to hit home...because we may know the stories of famous starlets or wealthy families with ungrateful and dissolute children who never work a day in their life, but...it is not just them after all, is it? That younger son, as disrespectful as he is, as selfish and self-absorbed as he is, reminds me of me...sometimes.

I am betting that all of us have had riches of one kind or another that we have taken for granted, and perhaps blindly squandered. The love of a parent or friend that we took for granted. An education, a job. A mentor or friend whom we never thanked, but simply took and took and took from them. There was something we accepted as our due, and which we did not truly appreciate until it was gone, until there was a fight, until there was a door slammed in our faces.

There is a bit of the younger son in me, how about you? I bet he is in all of us.

But he isn't the only one. This story gets behind my smugness with the attitude of the older brother as well. In him we see deep insecurity compounded with anger, the insecurity of that child who always does what others want out of desperate need to receive a sense of worthiness. And then, that child also gets outraged when they are forced to share the love they desperately long for, with anyone else. All others are seen as competitors for the love and acceptance they are craving. “I am good, love me. I work hard, love me more. I do everything you want, love me now.”

There is a bit of the older son in me, in all of us, too.

The hardest character to understand in this whole long emotionally messy family story... is the amazing dad.

A father who does not become hurt, or enraged at the selfish younger son. A dad who grieves for that child, longs for that child and sees that lost child from afar. A parent so deeply in love with their child that dignity, and decorum mean nothing and running to that lost and bedraggled child is just what their heart tells them to do.

A father whose love is greater than their judgement, whose heart is filled with forgiveness and joy. He is not guarded, there is no probationary period in his heart; nor is this parent considering a repayment plan.

This parent is gonna throw a party!

And to the dutiful son, who refuses to come in to the celebration, in jealousy and anger; to this child, the father again goes out, leaving behind his dignity and decorum to go to the angry elder son...straight to the hurt and the pain of that child who feels only the slight, and cannot comprehend the love they have.

This parent is compassionate and their heart is open.

This amazing dad wants all the kids, and the slaves too, to celebrate life and love.

A really great party is a place where people find love, and laughter and contentment. Where there is food and celebration and happiness.

There are jokes, but not mean ones; and there is dressing up, but only if it adds to the fun, and never in judgment; there is plenty to drink and to eat, but no one gets out of control from it; there is music, and maybe even dancing, but no one is left in a corner and everyone gets to be on the dance floor!

No worries. No embarrassment. That's the best kind of party!

The dictionary tells me that a parable is "a short story that teaches a moral lesson".

Well, I'm not going to argue with them, but I think Jesus is trying for something else in this parable and in many of his parables.

Jesus is a visionary, trying to help us see an entirely new way of looking at the world, he is a transformer of our sight.

Looking at the world with God's eyes:

- Eyes that are filled with love and longing for the lost children of the earth.

- And a heart that does not care for decorum or status, but leaps for joy at the ones who have finally turned to come home.
- With arms that embrace us, even when we are stupid and stinky and so so wrong, about how our lives would go!
- A welcome that goes out to us even when we are resentful and self-righteous, insecure or angry, blind to love that has been generously given since the beginning.
- A world where both the tax collectors and the scribes, the sinners and the Pharisees are at the heart of the party.

I asked you if you ever saw yourself in that younger son?

I asked you if you ever saw yourself in that dutiful elder son?

I ask you now, can you see yourself in that amazing dad?

Jesus hopes you can. I hope we can. With the courage to open our hearts, and the courage to forgive. Because the world needs to hear this story, and you and I need to live this story into the world.

Against the judgement and the harshness, the cold disdain and the heartless abandonment, the violence and the suffering:

- Let us vow to be generous and loving for the “deserving” and those who seem so “undeserving”.
- Let us be forgiving.
- Let us not be so concerned with decorum and status and wealth, but instead, be strangely, extravagantly generous, much to the surprise of the world.
- Let us act as if we loved everyone, and forgave everyone, and invited everyone to come and eat, and come and rest from sorrows, and come and party!

And remember to tell your own heart when it feels loss and shame, anger and unworthiness, that you, too, receive the love of the amazing dad.

Let us live, let us be, the parable of the prodigal sons, and the amazing dad!