

The Parable of the Prodigal Son

Sunday, June 15th

(this portion of the sermon was cut for time)

What is a parable?

A parable a story that teaches a moral lesson or spiritual truth using an analogy that usual involves an everyday situation. Some have called parables, “*earthly stories with heavenly meaning.*”

And here’s the cool thing: parables can teach many, many lessons at all once, depending on how you choose to look at it.

What lessons do you get when you see yourself as the prodigal son? Or as the older brother? Surely, when you get older, you may start to identify with the father. Or how about the fatted calf?

Using the Jewish art of “midrash,” where rabbis use creative liberty to reinterpret a Bible story beyond what it says on the page to prove a point. (In today’s sermon, the Bible doesn’t say anything about the prodigal son’s sexuality, but by using our creativity, we might be able to understand the parable in a different light.)

Today’s sermon has explored the idea that the prodigal son left home and went to live with the pigs as representative of his own self-worth and self-loathing – “*This is the most I am worthy of!*” We would have been taught this growing up, whether by parents, friends, or other adults in his life.

Now, imagine the roles reversed now: Children are not the only ones who come out to their parents; sometimes parents must also come out to their children. So, imagine if the prodigal son is the one who rejects Mom or Dad who has come out as homosexual? Queer folk can be found in all generations alive today; it not, by any means, a new phenomenon; just one that is accepted more today that allows a greater number of people to announce who they have always been.

In this version, the son leaves the family behind: “*Mom is no longer with dad.*” “*Now I have two moms.*” The child leaves – feeling betrayed, unbalanced, and confused. Everything feels topsy-turvy. But only upon their return do they find that their mom is the same mom, and their dad is the same dad they have always known. And they discover their lifelong parents running after them with open arms. They hug and kiss. That never changes.

Now imagine the church as the prodigal son. When the earliest Christians were doing their thing, they included into their fellowship both prominent female leaders as well as baptized eunuchs who were defined as sexual-minorities back then. Their encounter with their Living God and Risen Christ led them to become fully inclusive from the get-go. But we ran from this good home we knew and started putting up barriers of exclusion. This is our unfortunate heritage. And only when the church moves back into its mission to become fully inclusive again do we move toward a real reconciling between our prodigal ways and the Father who has been waiting for us all along to get it right again. It's never too late to return to the "good, old days" of when the church was blessed enough include *everyone*. And this is how the Father wants it.

Finally, imagine ourselves (as individuals *and* the church) as the older brother. The church is often upset that there is a party going on they felt they weren't invited to; everyone is there celebrating the coming out of our younger brother. But we miss out on the celebration, on earth and in heaven, when we refuse to join in the Celebration of Identity. When we're straight, we don't get a party. We were never "lost," never "dead." We didn't have to come out of the closet. And we stand outside the party, arms crossed, refusing to join in the Festivities of Life because we never got the Straight Pride Month we felt we deserved. Don't be like that older brother. Sometimes entire congregations and faith traditions keep themselves out of the Divine Party because of their sectarian, exclusive beliefs. Sometimes moms and dads fail to join the party because of their narrow sense of what it means to nurture and to protect.