

Luke 15:1-2, 11-32  
Following Him in Faith - 2  
May 5, 2019

“Living as Children of a Generous God (Part 2)”

**Grace, mercy and peace to you my brothers and sisters in Christ from God our Father and Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.**

In the parable we just heard, Jesus tells us of the father’s reaction to seeing his long-lost son, **(Luke 15:20b)** *“But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him.”*

A sociologist was writing a book on the challenges of growing up in large families. He wanted to understand how a parent could provide sufficient love to all of their children while avoiding favoritism. While interviewing a mother of 13 children he asked, *“Do you think all of your children deserve the full, impartial love and attention of a mother?”*

*“Of course,”* said the mother.

Hoping to catch her in a contradiction of some sort, the sociologist asked, *“Well, which of your children do you love the most?”*

She replied, *“The one who’s sick until he heals. The one who’s away until she gets home.”*

In the story we just heard, often called *The Parable of the Prodigal Son*, we see this type of love in the Generous Father. So ... we might call it *The Parable of the Generous Father*.

We know the story well. First ... his youngest son insults him ... calling him “as good as dead” ... when he asks for his inheritance in advance of his father’s death. The youngest son, selfish, impatient, and greedy for his inheritance says, *“Dad ... I can’t wait for you to die so give me my inheritance now!”* He wasn’t asking for a few bucks to hang out with friends ... or a loan to buy a new horse and chariot. He was asking his dad to liquidate the family estate and give him his share of the proceeds ... the share meant for him when his father died ... now. This

meant the family would be deprived of current assets upon which to build more assets. All this, so the youngest son could get his hands on his part of the inheritance now.

Generous to a fault, the father divides his property between his boys. The oldest gets his share ... the youngest gets his. The oldest dutifully stays home. The wild child rejects his father, brother, and roots as he hits the road to see the world in a faraway country. *“So long! See ya!”*

But the Generous Father loved his son ... even though he was far away. He never stopped looking for him ... waiting for his return. The Generous Father never stopped showering his grace, mercy, love, and provision on his prodigal son.

As the Generous Father maintains his constant, hopeful watch, things go from bad to worse for the prodigal ... and then it turns abysmal. He burns through the money ... he's broke ... and as a foreigner in a foreign land there's no social net to catch him. The little lost Jewish boy is forced to care for pigs ... begging for pig slop to fill his belly. It can't get much worse for him ...

When Jesus tells parables, He's teaching ... and the characters and objects all represent something. The young, wild child represents the “tax collectors and sinners” in Jesus' audience – those who had strayed from God's will found in His Word. And today, as Jesus speaks to us, the young man represents many of us. We often turn from God and His Word. Whenever we desire our own way, instead of His way, we turn away from Him. We take our inheritance ... the time He gives us, the talents He gives us, and the treasure He gives us – all to be used in His kingdom ... we take these gifts and use them as we see fit ... for our own purposes, for our own pleasure, for our own entertainment. We, like the young man, often think we know better what we need.

When we find ourselves in the pig slop, we often look for our own way out ... we can save ourselves ... until we can't ... then, by the power of the Holy Spirit, we come to our senses.

The young man comes to his senses! He suddenly remembers his time in his father's house ... how generous his father is. While he suffers from hunger, longing to eat even pig slop ... he remembers his father ensuring his servants had plenty to eat. Generous to a fault, the father provided for the needs of all who relied on him ... family or not. The young man decides to return to his father, trusting his generosity ... hoping he'll let him become a house servant.

But, despite the insults and rejection, the Generous Father continuously seeks out his son ... Which of his kids does he love the most? I bet he agrees with the mother of 13, "*I love the one who's away from home.*" It's easy to imagine this father has scanned the horizon daily as he waits patiently for his youngest to return. Then one day ... it happens! He sees a lone figure on the horizon. But he doesn't just wait for him to arrive!

**(Luke 15:20b)** "*But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him.*"

Grown men in Jesus' day didn't run. It was beneath their dignity – degrading and shameful. It might've admitted fear from something you ran from ... or maybe signaled subservience to one you ran toward. It meant humiliating yourself for all to see. But that's what the Generous Father did! He was so excited to see his son return that he ran to greet him. The father didn't lecture or rebuke his son. He didn't demand an apology or repayment. The father simply kissed and embraced him, for all to see ... even before the son could get his rehearsed confession out!

Generous to a fault, the father didn't even hear the confession as he ordered his servants to bring the formerly selfish, impatient, and greedy ... now sad, broken, and penitent ... son the finest family clothes, the family ring, and the richest of food, "*This boy may be a fool, but he's my fool! He's my son! Let the party begin!*" Without condition, he richly and generously forgives his son completely! He restores him to the family with all the rights and privileges that entails!

As the younger son was out squandering his part of the inheritance ... the older son has been diligently serving his father ... devoting himself to the family ... making sure the family business is taken care of. Coming in from another hard day in the fields, he hears the sound of partying ... only to find the good for nothing, immorally living, disobedient younger brother has returned. *“How could Dad forgive that ... that ... that ... son of his?!”* This son represents the judgmental Pharisees, and us ... when we feel the need to judge others by our standards ... refusing to forgive until our standards are met.

The Generous Father pursues his other son too! Like a servant begging his master, he goes to him ... he begs him to come into the party ... he humiliates and degrades himself once again in front of everyone ... all to bring his older son too back into the family fold.

But the older son is having none of it, *“You fool! That ungrateful son of yours ... He blew it all and you throw a party for him! By the way ... taking my fatted calf in the process! While I’ve been like a servant to you ... asked nothing of you ... obediently taking care of the business!”*

The father replies, (Luke 15:31) *“Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours.”*

The Generous Father represents God – the creator of all things ... the sovereign owner of all things ... including the things we think are ours. He is the generous and gracious giver to us of everything we (LSC, 1<sup>st</sup> Article of the Creed Explanation) *“need to support this body and life ... only out of fatherly, divine goodness and mercy, without any merit or worthiness in me.”*

God gives all of His creatures ... whether they fear, love, and trust Him or not ... everything they need to sustain and live their lives. In baptism we become children of a generous God! Our generous Father in heaven loves us ... He’s generous to a fault maybe; (John 3:16) *“For God so loved the world (you and me), that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.”*

Why? So we (LSC, 2<sup>nd</sup> Article of the Creed Explanation) “*may be His own and live under Him in His kingdom and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness.*” He chooses us to be His sons and daughters ... He gives us the vast treasure of (John 10:28) “... *eternal life, and (we) will never perish, and no one will snatch (us) out of my hand.*”

In point of fact ... we’re like the youngest son ... wallowing in the muck and mire of selfish desire and sin ... incapable of saving ourselves. But our Generous Father continually pursues us through the Holy Spirit! He causes us to remember His grace, to believe His promises, to turn away from our selfish, sinful lives and turn to Him. Then, He throws His arms around us! He graciously forgives us! He throws a banquet for us ... He makes us part of the family once again!

In point of fact ... we’re like the oldest son too ... self-righteously judging others while taking pride in our obedience as proof we’ve earned our way into His banquet. But our generous Father comes to us, again through the Holy Spirit, to help us see our sins of self-righteousness. He throws His arms around us! He graciously forgives us all of our sins! He invites us into His banquet for us ... desiring for us to rejoin His family once again!

Either way, we’re children of a generous God! A God who has brought us into His house, to live under His love, and to live our lives as living sacrifices. He calls us His sons and daughters, His chosen people ... for a purpose, to be His means to (Luke 19:10) “*seek and save the lost*” in Calvert County! Through His gifts to each of us ... time, talent, and treasure ... we are participants in His mission. He calls all of us to joyfully and cheerfully follow Him in faith by sacrificially serving Him in obedience using His gifts of time and talent to serve others in need ... as well as to serve His church in positions of leadership on our Board of Directors and Mission Boards. He also calls us to follow Him in faith by sacrificially giving some of His gift of treasure to support and expand His mission in His creation. Our Generous Father continually

pursues us ... so that through us He might pursue others to join Him in His heavenly banquet ... where He joyfully exclaims, (Luke 15:32) *“It was fitting to celebrate and be glad, for (these your) brother(s and sisters were) dead, and (are) alive; (they were) lost, and (are) found.”*

Let us Pray: Dear God, generous Father in heaven, we thank You for running out to us and welcoming us with open arms back into your family when we run away from You. Help us to fully trust Your generous provision by joyfully following you in faith by using the many gifts You have generously given us. We ask all this in Jesus' holy name. Amen.

James Kent