



### The Return of the Prodigal Son

FRIENDS, isn't it remarkable how many times we can hear the parables of Jesus and still find new meaning and insights into the timeless wisdom presented? A case in point is today's revisiting the story of the Prodigal Son.

One reason for the richness of this story is that at any given time we can identify with all three of the characters. When we examine our current state of living according to our faith, we may find that we are more like the younger son /brother who so completely disrespects his father by asking him for his share of the inheritance because he can't wait for the "Old Man" to die. He thinks, "better to have my fortune now because there is no telling how long he (the father) may live."

So many of the parables of Jesus seem to indicate extreme folly on the part of the characters he describes. What person in their right mind would leave ninety-nine sheep at risk in order to go in search of one that wandered off? Or what poor person who is so destitute that losing one coin is sufficient to upend her whole house searching for it? And upon finding it has a celebration inviting friends and neighbors to join in on the great turn of good fortune? Foolish to the extreme... the destitute seems to waste the coin (and perhaps even more) on celebrating... looking for one lost sheep when the shepherd knows there are dangers all around, and yet leaves the entire herd to go in search of one.

There can be at least two views to these scenarios. The first is in fact the extreme foolishness with which we so often act without thinking things through first. There are limitless ways to show the folly of mankind's ability to go to foolish extremes to find resolutions to problems that arise. In this sense Jesus' examples are perfect renderings of human foibles. We love to laugh at the slapstick shenanigans of a Charlie Chaplin or Laurel and Hardy movie, showing in a comical way how silly and foolish we can be.

On the other hand, we can view these scenarios as a great indicator of the crazy love with which God ceaselessly



pursues us. Last week Jesus pointed out that our top priority for being his disciple is to have God front and center in all aspects of our lives. This week is a reassurance of the tremendous rewards we can expect from our loving, eternal Father, if we would just follow in his ways.

### I will rise and go to my Father...

As foolish as we can sometimes act, we should always be aware that our God loves us. When we come to our senses and realize we have erred and sinned against him, we can have confidence that a little metanoia—change of heart—to amend our ways and turn to God for forgiveness, we can be reconciled once again with him who loves us unconditionally.

Many of the people reading this are parents themselves and can understand that unconditional love. They feel the same way about their own children. The great thing about that is, that in order for us to show that unconditional love, we have to have first received it from another. In this case, we have received every good facet of the love we experience directly from God.

In one episode of the "Peanuts" comic strip, Lucy has a helium-filled balloon which she gives to Snoopy, saying, "I'm going in for lunch, Snoopy...Hold this for me."

She puts the string of the balloon in his mouth and warns him, "Whatever you do, don't let go of it!"

So Snoopy sits there motionless, holding the balloon. It must have been a long lunch, because eventually he falls asleep, still holding on to the balloon. During his nap he yawns and, of course, the balloon takes off.

In that twilight zone between sleeping and waking he realizes what just happened and is suddenly wide awake and in a panic. In the final frame he is walking along the railroad tracks in the moonlight, with his belongings in a sack tied to a pole on his shoulder, saying to himself, "Make one mistake and you're doomed for life!"



Unlike Snoopy, we should not feel we are doomed for life. Forgiveness, a second chance, can always be ours. Are we prepared to give others a second chance?