

Rev. Paul A. Hottinger

**A Welcoming Intimacy**    Second Week of Lent    Saturday, March 22, 2014    8:15 AM  
Mi 7:14-15, 18-20; **Lk 15:1-3, 11-32** (Being in union with the Father, being open to the heart of the Father, being willing to be grasped by the Father.)

The story of the prodigal son of course is one of the very clever ways in which Jesus and the evangelist present the situation that **God is very willing to forgive, but we are not.** God is very willing to receive us into his arms, but we don't really want to do the same.

If you will recall the origin of this, the setting for this story, is the complaint of the Pharisees and scribes that Jesus welcomed sinners and ate with them. Of course eating with sinners is a very non-kosher thing; in fact, eating with gentiles is not kosher. Those who are strict, who follow the laws of the Talmud, regard eating as an expression of intimacy. Partly we have to accept that because Jesus gathering his apostles at the Last Supper was doing exactly that, sharing intimately his life and death, involving them in it by the very sharing of his body and blood. And so **the setting at a meal is a very, very intimate setting for a Jewish person.** And that I think we need to keep in mind and to honor.

So when Jesus eats with sinners he is really **welcoming sinners into his intimate life,** which of course the Pharisees thought was inappropriate. They had a different view. Their view was based on what the Law says and what the Law tells people to do. Jesus' view is very different. But very often we follow really more the Pharisees. We think of ourselves as being a result of our choices. Even Aristotle says that our characters are based on what we do habitually. So we get into this idea we are what we do. Yes, in a way, but not totally—that's what this parable is about. Ultimately, it's about **being in union with the Father, being open to the heart of the Father, being willing to be grasped by the Father.**

And the elder son, although he was quite right and quite obedient, really didn't love the father. He was doing all the right things for the wrong reason. And that's what Jesus is trying

to break open in us, too, that **we do the right thing for the wrong reason.** The right reason is that we love the Father. If the elder son had really loved the father and had done all these years of service for the right reason, then he would have also been delighted by the father's delight, but he wasn't because he was harboring his own little world. And **when we harbor our own little world, we are really cutting ourselves off from something much better, sharing the heart of the Father;** it's the best thing; it's the greatest thing. It's ultimately the only thing that can lead us to true happiness. And the father grieved for the elder son because he saw all this. He saw his goodness, his faithfulness, and his lack of love. What a terrible state to be in, but it's the state of many people.

So Luke tells us this story. He leaves it with us so that **we might contemplate where we fit.**