

Rev. Paul A. Hottinger

Both Loveless Sons Second Week of Lent Saturday, March 23, 2019 Mi 7:14-15, 18-20; **Lk 15:1-3, 11-32** (St. Turibius of Mogrovejo, bishop) (God wants to be a Father, and he wants to be a benevolent Father, a compassionate Father, a forgiving Father, a merciful Father.)

“He was lost and has been found.”

This famous story, one of the most popular in the Bible, the *Parable of the Prodigal Son* is about relationships. Now people don't always understand that God intends to relate to them as a Father. That's Jesus' constant message: **God wants to be a Father, and he wants to be a benevolent Father, a compassionate Father, a forgiving Father, a merciful Father.** This is what God wants. The problem is **we don't respond.**

The whole occasion of this parable was the **Pharisees and scribes complaining that Jesus was too friendly with sinners**, and not only friendly, but actually ate with them, which in Judaism is an act of intimacy. And they found this very objectionable, because according to the Law, you only ate with people who were clean and righteous; the company you kept was all about that. For Jesus it couldn't be because the company **Jesus kept was really the Father, and what he knew of the Father he wanted to share with everyone.** So in that very desire he is already way outside of the boundaries of the Law, of the Torah, of any group, of any standard, of any way at all. That is one reason **he said, “I am the way,” because the world has all kinds of ways.** The good of the world, the religious of the world, the spiritual of the world, have set up all kinds of ways to live a worthy, good life. But Jesus is beyond all that. **He is beyond what human beings think up. He is from the heart of the Father.** And what he extends to people is unreasonably—unreasonably—good and beautiful. And that causes trouble.

The Pharisees found it troublesome and the scribes, and of course the elder brother is a representative of that scribal, pharisaical point of view. It's all about what I've done for you, but

what we do for God is simply a response to what God has done for us. So it's really nothing. It's good, not to be discounted totally. But God's love goes beyond those boundaries that we have set up between good and bad, successful and unsuccessful, desirable and undesirable. Those are our distinctions, not God's. **For God all of his kingdom is for all of his people and all of his people are all that he has created.**

Now this **prodigal son** is no hero; he is an utter fool. And the only reason he returns is hunger and cunning. I mean he is **cunning**. He says, well, I'm starving and my father has servants that are better off than I am. I could go become one of them. That's cunning. It isn't really remorse, and **he never expresses real remorse**. In a way you could say, he is not capable of real remorse because **real remorse is motivated by love, and he doesn't have any love**. He is a selfish, rotten kid grown up now to become a selfish, rotten adult.

But **his brother** who is outwardly—outwardly—more dutiful, more obedient, more admirable, or even more honest, is actually inwardly the same. He **has no love for the father**. This is really a sad story about how these two sons, one of whom was righteous according to the Law and one of whom wasn't, both—**both—completely lacked love**. The elder brother has no love either. If he did, he would rejoice with his father, but he doesn't. He is selfish too in his own way. That's Jesus' point to the Pharisees and scribes, that you are just as bad. You are just as selfish because you are just as loveless, and **you need mercy just as much** as the prostitutes and the tax collectors and the other unworthies that I'm dining with. And that's a story that really all believers need to hear.