

Unrequited Love Fourth Sunday of Lent/C March 31, 2019 Jos 5:9a, 10-12; 2
Cor 5:17-21; **Lk 15:1-3, 11-32** (What connects us to God is only empathy, compassion,
and love.)

As we pass through the Gospel of Luke, we see **this unique and beautiful *Parable of the Prodigal Son***, but you can be sure that **the first audience who heard this parable hated it**. We have to put ourselves in their shoes. **Judea was an occupied land**. Think of Ireland under the British army or the Philippines occupied by Japan or Poland or Hungary under the heel of the Soviets. This was what Judea was like at the time of Jesus.

Now these prostitutes and publicans were actually employees of the occupying army. The prostitutes weren't just bad girls; they were collaborators. The publicans were public contractors, who also collected taxes, but they also built buildings for the Romans. So the Pharisees were not really being just snooty asking the disciples, **"What is your master thinking dealing with those people?"** It was a legitimate question. As usual, Jesus didn't answer it; rather he told a story, and it's actually a sad story. **It's a story of a very loving man who has two sons, both of whom were totally devoid of any affection or love for him.** The first wished him dead and asked for his share of the inheritance. After a wasteful spending spree, he found himself destitute and determined to return home as a servant. His return was calculated and rehearsed and totally lacking in any remorse or contrition. There is no sorrow in his words because **sorrow and remorse comes from love, and he didn't have any.** But nonetheless, the father welcomed him anyway and didn't only take him in as a servant, but restored him to his position as son. **The elder brother**, although externally more moral and respectable than his sibling, **was just as devoid of any love or compassion for his father.**

Jesus intended this as **a very sad commentary on human history, including the life of his own people. God's love is unrequited, period!** God does not react to his children but,

rather, acts out of his own nature. **God wants his children back and extends forgiveness, welcome, and restoration wherever there is even a little willingness to receive.** Like the prodigal son, the **prostitutes and publicans** were coming up empty, and they **were drawn to Jesus because he radiated the love of the Father.**

Now Jesus intended this parable as **a stern warning to his religious leaders** that they need to wake up and realize they are just as much in need of forgiveness as the publicans and the prostitutes, because they are just as devoid of real love; and perhaps even worse, they are not aware of their own emptiness. **All their righteousness is on the surface. Inwardly there's nothing.**

Now the purpose of our Lent is a heartfelt renewal of our relationship with our ever-giving Father and a deepened desire to celebrate with him the reconciliation he so desires and has accomplished in his Son, through his Son's death and resurrection. We have to keep in mind and completely grasp and take as our own the fact that religious practice and righteousness and even faith does not in themselves connect us to God. **What connects us to God is only empathy, compassion, and love.** And we are **enabled to have those gracious gifts of God through the passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus.** That is why we rejoice.