

Greetings in the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!

Please find below readings and sermon...

God's love and blessings to you. I look forward to welcoming you back to worship as soon as possible. The Lord be with you till then.

In the love of Jesus,

Pastor Steve

Luke 15:11b-32

The Parable of the Prodigal and His Brother

11 Then Jesus said, 'There was a man who had two sons. 12The younger of them said to his father, "Father, give me the share of the property that will belong to me." So he divided his property between them. 13A few days later the younger son gathered all he had and travelled to a distant country, and there he squandered his property in dissolute living. 14When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that country, and he began to be in need. 15So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs. 16He would gladly have filled himself with the pods that the pigs were eating; and no one gave him anything. 17But when he came to himself he said, "How many of my father's hired hands have bread enough and to spare, but here I am dying of hunger! 18I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; 19I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands.' " 20So he set off and went to his father. But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him. 21Then the son said to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son." 22But the father said to his slaves, "Quickly, bring out a robe—the best one—and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. 23And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; 24for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!" And they began to celebrate.

25 'Now his elder son was in the field; and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. 26He called one of the slaves and asked what was going

on. ²⁷He replied, "Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has got him back safe and sound." ²⁸Then he became angry and refused to go in. His father came out and began to plead with him. ²⁹But he answered his father, "Listen! For all these years I have been working like a slave for you, and I have never disobeyed your command; yet you have never given me even a young goat so that I might celebrate with my friends.³⁰But when this son of yours came back, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fatted calf for him!" ³¹Then the father said to him, "Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. ³²But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found." '

2 Corinthians 5:16-21

¹⁶ From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, we know him no longer in that way. ¹⁷So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! ¹⁸All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; ¹⁹that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. ²⁰So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. ²¹For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Do, can, and will you see what God sees?

Its spring of 2010, I am 3/4 of the way through my internship as part of my seminary education. I'm doing the morning duties of dropping my youngest at the time, Laurel, off at preschool in the bustling metropolis of Essex, Iowa, population 600. Outside the daycare I meet up with Brian Walker, a 50 something year old farmer who is a member of one of the six country congregations myself and my pastor-supervisor ministered too. Brian and I get to talking. We exchange pleasantries and engage in the not so small talk of farming life...the weather. It's planting season, Farmer Brian looks to the sky and as if delivering a sermon talks at

length about sun, rain, seed and the life that comes from it. In a manner I will never forget Brian shrugs his shoulders and says, “I don't know much about the science behind that seed turning into a corn or bean plant. But what I do know is, it's a miracle. I put it in the ground, and God takes over. That is until it needs to come out of the ground. Then it's on me. My part is to get it out of the ground so I can be a part of feeding God's world what it needs.”

Brian then goes on to say something that I had heard many times before from different people, but for some reason his perspective brought it to a whole new level. He would say, “Steve, if you are fortunate you will never “work” a day in your life, especially if everything you do is done to the glory of God. I don't see what I do as work. It's who I am. Its what I was created to do.” He was the first of a couple more farmers to share that same sentiment with me.

Whether you are intentionally seeking, or find yourself in the position of having to consider the viewpoint or life of another, we are called upon by God through the Spirit to see what God sees. What would God have you and I to learn? What would God have you and I set aside so as to bring the kingdom into focus for others? This morning's Gospel of the Prodigal Son can teach us a bit about perspective. A man has two sons...The younger of the two gets a wild hair and runs off and does the equivalent of “What happens in Vegas stays in Vegas.” Why did the man give the younger son His share of the property before the usual time? Death usually precedes an inheritance, especially in 1st century biblical times. This scenario was unheard of. And what's with the Son? What made him think his father would go for such a ludicrous idea, giving him his inheritance while he is still alive?

As the story goes, while in the depths of need and despair the son has an aha moment. The text reads, “He came to himself”. It does not say the Spirit came to him to say, *go home and be forgiven*. You and I the readers can rightfully ask, was his coming to his senses out of shame and guilt, or because he knew where he could get what he needed to survive? Either way, he does say, ‘I will get up and got to my father and say, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you, I am no longer worthy to be called your son.” (question)...Is it important for us to know whether or not the son's actions were out of a need to rectify his shame or apologize to God? Probably not, because the action of the father says it all. Before the Son could even become humble and utter his confession to his father something beautiful happens...Seeing

him from a distance, the Father runs to his lost boy. He doesn't walk. He runs. He doesn't stand there with his arms crossed or pace back and forth giving him the evil eye. Not even close. He runs to him. With no questions asked he embraces him and kisses him.

There was no, *Where have you been? What did you do? Did you bring shame upon yourself? Did you bring shame upon my name? Did you bring back any change?* It was a moment of pure unadulterated grace.

The father's actions said...You hurt me, but I will love you. You offended me, but I will love you. But he didn't. Why didn't the Father put him through the ringer? Surely he could have said, *your brother works his tail off and you, you do this. Get lost. Go back and live with and feed the pigs, or, stay here and be nothing more than a hired hand to me from this day forth as you suggested.* But he did not...He took it a step further. He dressed and adorned him with a ring and sandals on his feet and threw a party, a real first century shin-dig. The father spared nothing, clothing, food adoration, but most of all he did not spare him the most important of all, his love. The son who was now found, found and received by the gracious love of his father.

But that is not the whole story, because there is the older brother. The brother who would appear feels a combination of jilted, underappreciated, and maybe a bit uninformed. After all he wasn't invited to the party. It was only after he was coming home from the field that he heard the party. Why wasn't he invited? Was there a beef between him and the father? The eldest son was not happy. His brother's return was not cause for him to rejoice.

It was cause for him to be angry. So much so that he lashed out at his father...*I've done this and that, and haven't disgraced you as my brother did and this is what I witness!!! You throw him a party?! What gives!!!*...In the coolest of manners the father responds, "Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours." As if to say, *there is no reason for you to question my love for you because of how I have received your brother. They are not to be compared. Love is not to something to be measured and compared. True love is freely given and received. No strings attached.*

This parable Jesus tells is a great example about perspective and insight amongst people. Whenever there are people involved there is bound to be issues. Whenever we are talking about younger and older there is likely a power struggle. Whenever there is access to wealth for one and not another there are issues.

Whenever there is a perceived favorite, there is going to be a problem. Whenever love is given to someone who is thought to not deserve it...someone is going to take issue. Being human is messy. (Amen?) We have all been there...Have you ever felt slighted or wronged? Have you knowingly slighted or wronged someone? How about been given a bigger share of a wealth pie and been misunderstood because of it? Or been altogether left out?

Have you drawn the short straw when it comes to a relationship? Have you felt like you aren't celebrated over enough, not appreciated etc.? Do you have a hard time seeing why God would love someone for who you **think** you know they are? Are you jealous of love given?...I could go on, and on, and on, the possibilities are endless. Being human is messy. Right?!

If God could have it right, each and every one of us would be comfortable in our own skin, and those around us would love us for the skin we are in. We would seek to understand the thought processes of the next. We would set aside preconceived notions of others. We would not be jealous. We would not judge, hurt, oppress and so on. Wouldn't it be nice if when love showed up, be it any form, for any person, sinner or saint alike, our reaction would be nothing but rejoicing! I mean wouldn't it be great if we could just put our junk-filled minds aside and say, "That's it. That's what God intends. That is what God intends of us for one another." Do you see it brother and sisters in Christ? Do you see it? Do you see the love of God at work around you? It's there. In the midst of our individual and the world's darkness, the Spirit of God is truly at work.

Can you see it brothers and sisters in Christ? Can you see the love of God beyond our human complexities. Can you come to the place of understanding that God's love is for all, and that in the Son all are called to be of one mind as Paul says in 2 Cor. 5:16-17, *"From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, we know him no longer in that way. So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!"* Because of Christ, the Spirit is seeing to it that your eyes become new and see what God would have you to see that all are to be seen and loved as if it was Christ himself in your presence. Can you see what God sees?

God's goal is to bring all into conversation, bring us all in proximity to one another so that we can't look away, or deny our commonality in Christ. It is then we are made to recognize love despite our baggage. It is then we see the point of view we did not want to know. It is then we are made to look in the mirror and be asked by the love of God in Christ Jesus, "Will you see to what God wants to see for this world?"

Like the love of the father of the Prodigal Son, may gracious love take up residence in you because of the love of the cross of Jesus Christ. May the grace and love of Jesus displace judgment. May the grace and love of Jesus squelch a heart of inferiority or superiority. May the grace and love of Jesus turn you towards others over our human tendency to draw distinctions.

2nd Cor. 5:21 reads, *Jesus who knew no sin became sin, so that we might become the righteousness of God...So that we might become the righteousness of God...Might* as in, the ball is in our court. The goodness of God *can* be alive in us, *can* be seen and known by others, *can* become a reality to the least among us.

And it *will*, if we as Farmer Brian says, take root in and grow out of the life God creates in and all around us, and nourish the world with it. Because when our *will* succumbs to the Holy Spirit's *will*, we are guided to be the church and feed God's world what it needs, a message of hope born out of a gracious unconditional love that can only come from God the Father.

When our perspective of the world and God's people is centered in Christ we are living into our baptismal promises. In our baptism we are called to meet one another where we are at...just as Christ did. In our baptism we are called to walk with one another...just as Christ did. In our baptism we are called to engage this broken world through the love of the broken body of Jesus Christ for you. God has done the hard work. The death occurred. Your sins...forgiven. And the resurrection...it happened. Wherever you are the hands, feet and love of Christ, you are echoing the promise of the resurrection...new life from death.

Wherever you are the hands, feet and love of Christ, you are feeding the world what it so desperately needs, a message of hope. The hard work of the cross...for all. The gracious love of Christ...for all. Our part? Living into it and loving it. Love is never intended to be like work. Amen.