

Text: (Luke 15: 11-32 the Prodigal Son as depicted on Modern Parables Prodigal Sons) 2 Corinthians 5: 16-21

Title: New Beginnings, New Creation

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So, what did you think of Modern Parables? There is good reason that the Prodigal Son is one of the most popular of Jesus' parables. It tells the story of 2 brothers- one that could easily be written today- and from we have seen would fit very well within modern parameters. The problem with popular parables though is that we think we know what they say, to the point where we unconsciously tell ourselves what we know what is coming next- and mentally check out. For instance, if I had asked you last week who was the parable about – most of us would have listed the characters in this order- Younger Son, Father, Older Son. Yet Luke makes it very clear that all the parables in chapter 15 are directed against the Pharisees and the Scribes who were condemning Jesus for associating with tax collectors and sinners. Jesus wanted them to understand that they were the older son- and that the jury was still out on how they would react to God's lavish gift of grace for the rest of us.

The video gets it right is that the principal character is the older brother. Ok maybe it is because I am the eldest of 3 that I always was rooting for the older brother. I mean he does everything right- in the face of the younger brother's over the top behavior. The guy in the board meeting nails it- by asking for his inheritance early the younger son clearly wishes his father was dead! It's even worse in a first century context. For without modern banking, the Father would have had to sell out all of his holdings in order – committing financial suicide. Same here- only in the modern version he is taking the financial health of all their employees down the tube with him. I love the sequence where the older brother is figuring out how fast his younger brother is going through his money- down to the second!

But the real reason that we love the Prodigal Son so much is that we see ourselves as the Prodigal. I may root for the older brother but Lord knows I stand in need of the forgiveness that the Father freely gives. Now I may not have blown through, what was it, \$26 a second, but I have squandered my fair share of opportunities. I may not have used people and tossed them aside as the younger son did, but I am guilty of

sometimes viewing people, not as the cherished children of God, but as obstacles to be overcome as I pursue my own goals and ambitions. We love the Prodigal Son because we are as guilty as him- and yet are as forgiven and accepted as him.

One of the things that the video makes explicit; one of the things that the parable only hints at is that, as forgiven as the Prodigal may be, he still is not out of the woods. The father may have welcomed him home, but the company belongs to his brother. The Father may have given him a party- but it is going to be up to the brother to give him a job. And while we know that the younger brother has experienced a genuine change of heart- there is no way that the older brother could know that. to the best of his knowledge, the younger brother is still as selfish and as self destructive as he has always been. But the story ends there, we never know if the younger brother has an opportunity to turn his brother's heart around.

At the risk of pushing the analogy too far- this highlights one of the central challenges we face. It is all well and good to be forgiven by the Father- but if we do not experience a genuine turnabout in our lives, we remain the same miserable, self obsessed creatures we always have been. The folks over at AA have a name for this- the dry drunk- he may not be drinking anymore, but he hasn't changed any of the behaviors that drove him to drink to begin with. He may be sober, but he is still as miserable, still a disaster waiting to happen. Unless we experience a genuine turnabout in our lives, we remain spiritual dry drunks, inflicting ourselves on the people around us, spreading misery in our wake. And no matter how hard we try- we cannot generate that inner turning around. We need divine intervention. We need to be re-created from the inside out.

The Good News, the Gospel this morning is that is exactly what we have experienced in Jesus Christ. This is not the promise of the Gospel, this is the reality of the Gospel. In 2 Corinthians Paul has spent the last chapter or so explaining to the Corinthians the motivations behind his team's ministry; that they have experienced this inner regeneration and that they want the Corinthians to experience it as well. Step one- verse 17: recognize that we are all new creations. ALL of the old has passed away, EVERYTHING has become new. More than the forgiven Prodigal, we now are agents of the Most High God- sent to reconcile others to Him, just as we have been reconciled.

This is important. We are more than God's forgiven people; we are God's forgiven NEW people. And because we have experienced this inner newness- we are able to invite other to participate with us in this experience, becoming God's agents in the plan to reconcile the world.

Jesus told the parable of the Prodigal Son to the self righteous Pharisees and Scribes, those who were offended that sinners were experiencing forgiveness. The parable ended before we find out if the older brother joined with his Father in extending forgiveness to his brother. Our video ends on the same note- will he come around. Fortunately for us, we are in charge of writing our own ending to the story. We pray "Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors." What Paul wants us to understand is that it works the other way around: Because we have been forgiven we are now made new- Now that we are made new we are actually ABLE to forgive other. We know how our story ends, let us sing of God's forgiveness as we build his Kingdom, one forgiven soul at a time.