

Last Sunday we began a two-part series on the parable of the prodigal son. Jesus invited us to *Behold the Father's Love...for those lost in sin* – namely, us. We saw in the prodigal son our own rebelliousness, our “lostness” in sin. But thanks be to God we *behold the Father's love* for us lost sinners. Not a love that waited for us to come to him, but a love that sought out the lost; not a love that was worried about dignity or honor, but a love that was humiliatingly poured out in the blood of Jesus on the cross; not a love that denies forgiveness to rebellious children, but a love that has run to us, hugged us, kissed us, and welcomed us home – a love that will welcome us into the celebration of heaven.

But what about the rest of the story? Well, I tell you, this parable is far from over. This morning Jesus invites us to continue to *Behold the Father's love...for those lost in themselves*. And as we receive this loving invitation, please...

Conspicuous by his absence in the first part of the story is the older son. What's he been up to while all of this is going on? All the right things, of course. He was obedient, dutiful, hardworking. And with the scandal his brother has caused, you can imagine the praise people heaped on him. Yes, that one's the “good” son.

But when his prodigal brother returns, everything changes. The older brother *was in the field*, probably supervising his father's laborers. But, *as he approached the house, he heard music and dancing*. Obviously, he was curious as to what the celebration was all about, particularly, I would imagine, since he hadn't been invited. So, *he called one of the servants and asked what was going on*. The servant replied, *Your brother is here! Your father killed the fattened calf,*

*because he has received him back safe and sound*. (25-27).

Now wouldn't you expect a brother to leap for joy? Wouldn't you expect him to run into the house to welcome his prodigal brother home? Sadly, *the older brother was angry and refused to go in*. (28a).

You see, with the return of the younger brother, the elder brother is confronted with the father's joy. And suddenly, there becomes very visible, a resentful, proud, unkind, selfish person – one that had remained deeply hidden, yet grew stronger and stronger with the passage of time. He's so lost in himself that he lashes out at his father in the only way he can - he refuses to participate in his father's joy and join the celebration. And in so doing, he publicly embarrasses his father. (Nice couple of sons this father had, huh?)

Of course, the word of this insult makes its way into the father and, consequently, to all the guests. And, as you can imagine, there would have been a flurry of comments behind hands, gasps at the behavior of the older son, and probably a general feeling of tenseness as the guests anticipated the reaction of the father.

But again, just like in response to the younger son's rebellion, there's no bellow of rage, no slamming down the silverware, no ordering servants to force the son to come in. No, for a *second* time that day the father's reaction is incredible. *Behold the father's love* as he swallows his pride, and personally seeks out a lost son. We're told that the *father went out and began to plead with him*.

At this point in the parable, it's important that you understand a little Greek word, the word that was used when it says that the father *began to plead with* the son. It is from the Greek word *kaleo*, which means to call. A word like that in Greek can be used a lot of different ways depending upon the prefix. When the older son calls the servant to stand before him to give account, the word used there is that he *pros kaleo*'s the servant. He

makes the servant stand in front of him—*pros*. But when the father goes out to entreat the son to come into the banquet the word is not *pros kaleos*. He doesn't stand before his son as if to give him a command. The word is *parakaleo* (*para* means *beside*). In other words, he stands *alongside* his son and says, "Son, you're mine. You've always been mine. Come, join the celebration." It's the same word that John uses when he uses the word *paraclete* speaking of God, the Holy Spirit, who comes in the Son's name to stand next to us, to be our Comforter.

Understand what is happening here: The older son sees himself as a servant with rights, not as a son with privileges. The older son is a Pharisee like the ones to whom Jesus addresses this parable. A Pharisee knows his status, knows his position, knows his rights, but who, in the rebellion of his heart, does not know the father's love.

Just listen to how lost in himself the older son is as he responds to his father's loving invitation: ***Look, these many years I've been serving you, and I never disobeyed your command, but you never gave me even a young goat so that I could celebrate with my friends. <sup>30</sup>But when this son of yours arrived after wasting your property with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him!***

Again, the older son saw himself as a servant with rights, not as a son with privileges. He saw his role as the eldest son to be a heavy burden. He resented his father for his lot in life. He knew his status, he knew his position, and he knew his rights. He was so lost in himself, so lost in the rebellion of his own heart, that he refused to *behold his father's love*.

You might think at this point that the father would say, "Why you ungrateful little...! You haven't lacked one thing, and now that your brother has returned you look down your nose at your brother and turn your back on me. Get out of my sight! Get out of my house!" But he didn't. *Behold the father's love* as he persistently invites the older son to join in the celebration, pleading with him to join

in the joy. ***Son, you are always with me, and all that I have is yours. <sup>32</sup>But it was fitting to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again. He was lost and is found.***

*Behold the father's love for one lost in himself.* And that's how it ends. All of a sudden, it's just all over. That's it. And we're left with this kind of disgust for the elder son. We're disgusted with his arrogance and selfishness. We're disgusted by the way he turns on his father. And rightly so. Remember why Jesus told this parable in the first place: ***the Pharisees and the teachers of the law*** were muttering to themselves, ***"This man welcomes sinners and eats with them."*** As if that's a bad thing! No wonder nobody likes Pharisees!

But Jesus wanted the Pharisees to clearly see how truly lost they were in themselves, that they could not *behold the father's love*, either. You see, *they* were the older son. Jesus was the father who welcomed sinners and now was lovingly inviting the Pharisees to join with him...and they refused.

You know, it was easy for us last week to identify with the younger son, the wasteful, prodigal son. But I'm sure that it comes as no surprise, as much as we hate to admit it, there is also a bit of the proud older son inside each of us, too. Don't get me wrong, I doubt that any of us would be mad because Jesus shows *love to those lost in sin*. After all, we all-too-readily recognize ourselves as lost in sin. But are we just as ready to hear Jesus' parable and be led to see how lost we are in ourselves?

When my wants, my tastes, my priorities, my desires trump the needs of others, I am the older brother, lost in myself. When my opinions, my ways, and my ideas become the only right opinions, ways and ideas, I am lashing out, making petulant demands of my heavenly Father. Anytime I put my selfish feelings up against the loving generosity of my Father, I am shrugging off his counsel and denying his compassion. And though it isn't as overt or as easily recognizable, it

is also just as dangerous for us older sons to choose spiritual apathy and indifference. Maybe we don't get angry, but is it really that much different to simply ignore the father as he pleads at our side? And if you have been sitting here this morning saying to yourself, "Yeah, it's good for other people to hear this." then you are more of a Pharisee than you realize. No, the truth is, we are more like the older son, more like the Pharisees, than we care to admit.

And the result is staggering. Did you notice how abrupt the end of the parable was? It leaves you asking, what happened? Yeah, it was great to hear how the lost was found to shouts of celebration, but what about the older son? Did he come to *behold his father's love*, too? Or was there a permanent rift?

Sadly, the reality of the parable is this: Jesus was the father and the Pharisees were the elder son. Going on that, the older son polarized himself from his father's love. The father loved him, but the son loved himself more. The father reached out to him, but the older son pushed him away. He wouldn't *behold the father's love*. And in the end the older brother and his friends, took the father out behind the banquet hall and nailed him to a tree.

How's that for an ending to the parable? And yet, that's exactly what God has recorded not only *for* us but *about* us in his Word. We are the ones who have refused the father's love with our sin, our arrogance, our demands. We are the ones who nailed Jesus to the cross. We are the ones who are lost in ourselves and deserve to pay for our crime for eternity.

*But behold the father's love. Behold the father's love for us who are lost in ourselves.* Because ***in all things, God works for the good of those who love him.*** You see, even the horrific crime of murdering the son of God, he turns into good for us. Even though we have often refused to *behold the father's love*, he offers it, wraps us up in it, welcomes us home in it, and pleads with us to join in the joy it.

Yes, *Behold the father's love* FOR you. Love that didn't reject you when you rejected him. Love that doesn't forget about you when you forget about him. Love that doesn't leave you lost when you're lost in yourself. No, *behold the father's love* that accepted you, remembered you, and most importantly found you before you could be lost in yourself for eternity.

And now, even as you *behold the father's love* FOR you, *behold the father's love* IN you. Love that shows itself in selfless giving back to the Lord. Love that shows itself in a life of witnessing to the reality of God's love in Christ. Love that puts the needs of others before our own. Love that results in our joining the Father's celebration for eternity. My fellow believers – those lost in sin and those lost in themselves – *behold the father's love*. Amen.

