



The Westminster Pulpit

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“Party On!” **Sermon on Luke 15:11-32**

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Luke 15 starts out like this – “Now, all the tax collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to him. And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, ‘This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them.’”

All the tax collectors and sinners were coming near... drawn to him by a Word of grace. Drawn to a word that hopes for us, drawn to a word of mercy, drawn to a word of healing, drawn to a word of love. “There is a balm in Gilead that makes the wounded whole - to cure the sin-sick soul!”

“All the tax collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to him.” What do you suppose drew them in? What would draw you in? There are truths that aren’t true for everyone but speak to you. Some of you in here need a Word from God that says, “It’s going to be alright.” Some of you here need a word that says, “Stop what you’re doing, and come back to me.” Some here need a word that says, “Do you love me? Feed my sheep.” Some need a word that says, “It’s a miracle.” Some need a Word that says, Let me lead you to the green pasture beside still waters.” Many of you don’t know what you need, you just need. What do you need?

All the sinners were coming near to listen to him.

And to this need, the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled! I guess what they needed was a dividing line between us and them. “Cut them off! They aren’t worth it.” Reaching out to the wrong people can be a grumbly thing.

But Jesus responds to grumbles with joy! As if Jesus loves his job. Whistling as he works. He thinks salvation is like a party. Like the party the shepherd threw after he left the 99 sheep and came home with the one who ran off! He left the 99 behind and

came back with that one sheep thrown over his shoulder. “Rejoice with me, for I have found what I lost!” It’s party time! There’s more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over the 99 who need no repentance.

Salvation is like a party! There was the woman who lost a coin. She had ten, and now she has nine; found it! “Rejoice with me, for I have found what I lost! It’s party time! I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents!

Salvation is like a party! Jesus tells one more parable that goes like this.

Luke 15: 11-32

So he told them this parable: ‘There was a man who had two sons. The 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. A 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. When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs. He would gladly have filled himself with the pods that the pigs were eating; and no one gave him anything. But 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! I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands.’ ” So 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. Then the son said to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.” But 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. And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!” And they began to celebrate.

‘Now his elder son was in the field, and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. He called one of the slaves and asked what was going on. He replied, “Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has got him back safe and sound.” Then he became angry and refused to go in.

His father came out and began to plead with him.

But 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. But when this son of yours came back, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fatted calf for him!” Then the father said to him, “Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is

yours. But 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.” ’

Luke's Gospel is a party of salvation!

It's Luke we read at Christmas! Mary ran with haste to her cousin Elizabeth. Elizabeth opens the door, and John the Baptist does a backflip in her belly! It's party time.

Luke is the joy we turn to, the act of repentance. We turn towards the Word that goes down the center aisle. “Suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, ‘Glory to God in the highest heaven!’”

The shepherds ran to see this thing that the Lord has made known! And Mary treasured the words! The shepherd returned, glorifying and praising God for all that they had seen and heard... “Joy to the world, the Lord is come!” It's a party!

It's for everyone! But it's not for everyone!” I have a nativity set that I set out at Christmas! Angels, shepherds, Mary and Joseph! And then I have added, in honor of years of ministry, a figure who shows up with arms crossed and a face with lips puckered, looking like they've sucked on a lemon all their lives. A little figure who says on that Holy night, “The nerve of those stinky shepherds, showing up on Holy Night! It's the middle of the night! She's just given birth.”

Every party! Every Party! Every party has what is called a “Party Pooper!” It is what it sounds like. Is that you?

Is that how you show up?

Are you the one who rips open the envelope to read the invitation, “Join us April Fourth to celebrate...” “Hold on! Hold on! Who in their right mind gets married on Final Four weekend? Of all the weekends to have a wedding! But your significant other says, “You're going, and you're going to be happy!” So, you cancel your airline ticket to San Antonio and go to the wedding so that on the hour, you can walk your daughter down the aisle!

You can't fake being at a party! You see this downtown. You look at those pedal taverns or those party wagons. There's always a bridesmaid or two or four who just appear in need of salvation. You can tell she'd rather be somewhere else than peddling in cowboy boots.

Every party has a party pooper! If I were the prodigal, I'd be the party pooper. I couldn't help myself! If I truly looked at what I had done, if I had claimed my share of the inheritance before Dad was dead and walked off and spent it all on me! If my repentance was based on my hunger, I'd need food. I'd need to come home. And suddenly, Dad is running towards me! Not with a ball bat, but with a hug! Ring on my finger, “Strike up the band! We're going to have a party!”

I'd be the party pooper “Can we turn the music off? It's too much! Dad, I need, we need, we need to sit down together to examine the wounds I caused you.”

But no! Music! Kill the fatted calf! Get the robe - the best one! It's like Dad lost his memory. No memory of the pain. No memory of the loss. It's party time!" You've returned to me!"

The ability to remember is in the mind of the older brother. "Dad, don't you remember what he did! Don't you remember what I've done! Worked like a slave for you! I never got a party! I smell steak! I never got a goat! Seriously! A party!

It is hard to have a party when no one understands the party!

The father has to explain the party. "Son, you've always been with me. And all that I have is yours! When you have to explain a party, that kind of takes the party right out of the party!" When you're at the wedding and someone says, "How much did you spend on the band?" "What do we do with all these monogrammed beer koozies? When you question the cost of a party, it kind of kills the party!

Every once in a while, I think I'd like to preach a sermon on the prodigal son from the standpoint of the fatted calf. I mean, talk about spending too much on a party. The fatted calf has to give it all! For what? Dad, can we talk about wounds? Dad, I've worked like a slave for you! Can you imagine being sacrificed for a party that no one seems to understand?

It's kind of like that question someone raised: Were you there when they crucified the Lord? And the one closest to him said, "No, I don't know what you're talking about, I don't know him! I told you I've never seen him before in my life!" The one closest to him turned his back on him and ran away from all that love....

Meanwhile, that love gave his life... for a joyful feast for the people of God. All are welcome! Those who grumble. Those who worked as slaves. Those who are hungry. Those who spend all their money on themselves. This is a joyful feast! For those who draw near to the Lord and know the embrace of home! My child, it is good to have you with me! People will come from the east: from Russia and Ukraine. People will come from the west: Japan, Korea, and Myanmar. People will come from the north: Canada, and Greenland. They'll come from the south: Mexico, Venezuela, and Antarctica.

People will come! Party on!

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