



“Come Meet Jesus ... Who Welcomes Us Home”

Fourth Sunday in Lent
Saturday & Sunday, March 30–31, 2019
All Services
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Camp Hill, Pennsylvania

Luke 15:1-3, 11b-32

Grace to you and peace, from God who is, who was, and who is to come. Amen.

I have mentioned, many times that I am, admittedly, not the best, or most courteous, driver around. I readily yell at other drivers when they do things that I deem to be stupid or dangerous. Like passing me on the right-hand side. Or riding my rear bumper when I'm *already* going ten miles over the speed limit (and speed limits are, really, just a *suggestion*, anyway, usually put in place by people who think “safety” is way more important).

What really gets me, though, and it happened again just yesterday afternoon, is, when I'm approaching the 15 / 581 interchange, that Penn DOT, in their infinite wisdom, chose **not** to make into a full cloverleaf. Rather, if you are heading North on 15, and want to head West on 581, instead of taking a right-hand exit, you need to be in the far-Left lane, in order to cross south-bound traffic and get onto 581. And there are people who apparently *cannot* see the signs, those big twenty by thirty, green and white, signs, that say that West Bound 581 is a Left Hand Exit, so when they reach the intersection, and are in the right lane, suddenly realize they need to be in the far Left lane, and so, instead of doing the Safe and Legal thing of going just a little farther to the Camp Hill Mall and turning around, NO, they pull into the Middle Lane, put on their left turn signal, and STOP, waiting for someone in the Left Turn lane to let them in. Traffic is going between thirty-five and sixty miles an hour, and they just STOP. And I curse like I'm insane!

I am, really, just, **not** a nice guy behind the wheel. I have to remind myself **all the time** to remind myself to use **All** of my fingers when I wave at another driver.

Sometimes, though, not often, but *sometimes*, I **am** able to catch myself, and Stop myself, from doing something far too rude or obnoxious or even too dangerous. Not *always*, not by a long shot. but *sometimes*, I **am** able to come to my senses, come to myself, and realize the *stupidity* of what I am either about to do or am already in the midst of doing, and make myself stop.

And it's that *coming to senses*, coming to myself, that caused me to relate to our gospel reading today. You might not have caught it. I know, with all the times I've read this parable, I've usually sped right past it, but this time it kind of jumped out at me. Let me attempt to show you.

We're all pretty much familiar with the story of the Prodigal son, right? Or at least, we *think* we are. Jesus tells this story, this parable, to strive to illustrate a point.

The lead up to this is that many of the "Pharisees and the scribes" were complaining about Jesus behind his back (didn't know that there were Lutherans scriptural, did you?). They were griping with one another and saying,

"This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them."

It's like they're *purposefully* trying to tick Jesus off.

They *are* stating fact: Jesus had the *audacity* to allow *tax collectors* and *sinners* come into his presence and listen to him. What's the deal with tax collectors? (I realize we're coming up on April 15th, we might have our OWN ideas of what's up with tax collectors). In First Century Palestine, tax collectors worked, not for the local government. They worked for the *occupying* government, for the **Romans**. They only got paid by gouging their fellow citizens. And tax collectors tended to make a fine living.

Sinners, of course, well, who wants to hang around sinners? Their sin might rub off on those who are pious, those who deem themselves to be holy, righteous, above reproach (at least in their own minds). And here Jesus is, surrounded by one group of people - sinners & tax collectors - while attempting to dope slap the self-righteous religious leaders.

So, Jesus gives them a story: There's a small businessman with two boys, who will eventually inherit the company. The younger one can't wait, because he's got stuff to do, places to go; he's got big dreams, along with maybe/probably some partying. So, he asks for his share, and for some unknown reason, because Jesus doesn't say, his father gives it to him. Off he goes, and in a very short amount of time, he ends up squandering **everything**. It's like he's *purposefully* trying to tick his father off. And worse, as soon as his money runs out, the recession hits. Along with all the floods. And those big fires. Food is scarce. Jobs are non-existent. He is in some Really Deep . . . Stuff. The only means of employment he **can** find is something that is almost *completely reprehensible* to him. *Almost*. He still does it, but he hates doing it.

While he's in the midst of doing this *abhorrent* job, he comes to himself, gives himself the Gibbs dope slap on the back of the head, and says,

"At my father's business, even the lowliest worker has it better than I do right now. If I go home, I can hire on in *whatever* position they'll give me. I'll be better off than I am right now. I'll say to my father: I am sorry. I was foolish and frivolous and stupid, and I do not deserve to be called your son. But I need **food** to eat, and a decent place to **sleep**. I will do anything. Please, give me a job. **Any** job."

So, he walks away from the disgusting job he has, hoofs it back home, and starts walking up to the old man's business.

Dad sees him, walking up the road. Dad goes out to meet him, and he does **not** say to him "Get off my property." Dad does **not** slam the door shut in his face. Dad sees the son walking up road, and Dad **runs** out to meet him. This *dignified* businessman hitches up his trousers and *sprints* down to the road to his wayward son. The son - we've got to give the guy credit - the son tries to do his prepared and practiced line:

Father, I am a total idiot who does not deserve to be called your son. . .

But before he can get any farther along in his speech, Dad **grabs** him, and kisses him, and calls for one of his employees to bring his son clean clothes and start the fixings for a feast, because HIS SON IS HOME!

Except . . . and this is where real life kicks into the story, and we know that Jesus is speaking truth, because the *older brother* sees and hears all this, and big brother is **pissed**. Older brother does what I am fairly certain is the John Brock reaction if **my** sibling had pulled this crap, because, as I attempted to point out with my driving habits, I am a *mean and vengeful* person. Older brother becomes *angry* and *refuses* to take part. Dad *does* go and attempt to explain his own actions to his elder child, but big brother really doesn't want to hear it. Dad talks about forgiveness and rejoicing and starting over, and then the story ends. We never find out what happens next.

But did you catch that part in the middle? It wasn't even a full sentence. The first half of verse 17:

¹⁷ But when he came to himself, he said,

“When he came to himself . . .”

Have **you** ever come to yourself? Have you ever been in the middle of something, maybe something you love doing, maybe something you don't really care about, maybe, whatever... Have you ever been doing *something*, and realized it was **not** what you *wanted* to be doing, what you *should* be doing? Maybe you couldn't even figure out *why* you were doing it in the first place? Like, maybe, you were purposefully trying to tick yourself off? Did you give yourself the Gibbs dope slap to the back of the head?

What did the younger son do fix his situation? After he comes to himself, he goes . . . *Home*.

What is it that drags you down? What is the place that you find reprehensible? It might be *anything*. Maybe it's your *job* that's sucking the life out of you. Or maybe it's your *best friend* who isn't letting you out of some crappy situation you've gotten into. Maybe it's your stupid driving habits. It might be a personal financial situation. Or maybe an addiction to, well, an addiction to *anything*. What is it that is keeping you from **home**?

But, by *home*, what I mean here, is *Not* necessarily the place you grew up. By *home*, for us, here, in *this* story, *home* is the place where we feel **safe**; *home* is the place where we feel **loved**. And if you *don't have* a place like that in your life, then you need to find one. Because it's in **that place** where God speaks the loudest to us. It's in **that place**, where we can hear God the best. It's in **that** place, *wherever* home is, where God *runs* to meet us. It's in **that** place, where Christ says,

Get this child clean clothes, and let's start the feast, for My Child - that's right, Christ calls you **My Child** -

My Child was dead, and is now alive, My Child was lost, and now is found.

Come, Meet Jesus . . . Who Welcomes Us Home.

Amen.

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