

The Lost Boys

Scripture: Luke 15:1-3, 11-32

Laura Smith Conrad

March 14, 2010

Scripture: Luke 15:1-3, 11-32

15Now all the tax collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to him.

2And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, “This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them.”

3So he told them this parable:

11Then 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 traveled 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.'"

Proclamation of the Word

There are at least two sides to every story.
And the fracture in a relationship might happen quickly in a SNAP!

Or

It might take years for the damage to be done.

Slowly over time minor incidents take its toll.

Listen to one son's side of the story...

Elder Son: He always did know how to manipulate father.

that son of his...always fooling around, never serious.

He forced Dad's hand making him divide the property early so that he could go to Vegas and squander what our family has been working hard to build over the years.

It has taken years to grow the family business.

Since we were kids he was always the one to get away with everything.

Once when we were supposed to be taking care of the animals for the day,
He went off to play ball with our cousins for hours leaving me holding the bag.

If I had not been there the sheep would have wandered off and gotten lost.

Good thing I was willing to take care of everything so he could do as he pleased.

Sure, I wish, I could be hanging out with my friends instead, but Dad trusted us. I could not let him down.

So no big surprise when he up and took off...

doing whatever he felt like

with no concern for anyone else but himself.

And now Dad is bringing out the best of everything...killing Mabel, our best cow,
calling everyone to come over to the party. He even took a robe, some sandals,

and the ring out my house for that no good son of his.

What is he thinking?

I thought he had lost it when he divided up the inheritance before his death and gave it all to us.

This cannot be happening.

I am so sick and tired of working hard everyday and seeing some slouch take advantage of our family...expecting someone else to clean up his mess.

He is so irresponsible.

I wish he had never come back.

Who is that coming this way? He found me. Here comes Dad.

Now listen the other side of the story...

Younger Son:

This is my only chance.

I have burned every bridge.

No one is left to help me out of this mess.

I have to go home and face Dad.

Home is the only place where they have to take you in, they say.

But worse than facing Mom and Dad will be the glare of that son of his.

He always did think he was better than me.

He always had it easy.

Mom and Dad always knew he could handle anything.

I was the stupid one...fun...entertaining...always a mob of friends.

But he always got good grades, excelled in sports, and got the awards at school growing up.

Once when we were taking care of the animals,

he made me feel like nothing I did was right.

He always knew more or a better way to do everything.

I got so mad I just left and found some guys to kick the ball around with.

Of course, he told on me.

Dad looked so disappointed in me.

I always have a way of messing everything up.

And here I am again, down to nothing....feeling like a nobody.

Everything I touch turns bad.

There's nothing else to do but to face up to it...

Admit I was wrong and once again a disappointment to the family.

I will go home and hope that Dad will let me work like one of his hired hands...

At least I will have food...and maybe

maybe

I can earn his respect and trust again...

Wait who is that fool running towards me?

Oh, that's Dad. Dad????

Meanwhile back to Jesus....

Jesus tells the powerful parable about a welcoming father and two lost sons.

He tells it in light of what has just happened.

Jesus is catching flack from the Pharisees about dining with sinners and tax collectors....they are grumbling among themselves...these Scribes and Pharisees, those who are dutiful and faithful to the laws.

They grumble, "This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them."

In response to the religious leaders' criticism Jesus tells a story.

When we hear a story we can find ourselves in it. We identify with a character or an experience and we might think, "Oh, I have not seen that about myself before" or "Wow, that is what God is like."

A story is a mirror that helps us see something new

Mirrors reflect lighthelping us to see.

If we are to hold this Parable of the Prodigal Son up as a mirror, where do you see yourself?

- Who is this irresponsible, self-centered son to you?
- Who is the dutiful, yet resentful older son to you?
- Where do you find yourself among this family?
- Who are these folks in our community? Our world?
- What brothers have we built up resentment and anger towards?
- How have we squandered resources entrusted to our care?

Ultimately, this parable is of two lost sons, not just one prodigal. Jesus tells the parable of the lost sheep and the lost coin. In the same way, this is a tale of lost boys- two lost sons.

The first son wishes his father dead, basically, when he asks for his share of the inheritance. In fact, the word used several times for the share of property is literally his share of the father's "life", his *bios*. The son is asking for the father to give everything to his sons before his death. That is a bold, selfish move on behalf of the son. He has approached his father in a culture where the father speaks first, not a son. In addition, by asking for his share now, the father must divide all his property and give his older son his share leaving the father in the care of or dependent upon his sons.

The second, older son is also lost to the father. He is eaten up with anger at his father's other son and confused by the father's irresponsible generosity. You notice he even calls the brother "Your son" to his father and not "my brother." He resents his indulgent brother and is jealous of him. He cannot imagine how this thoughtless brother can do this to his father and to him. And if he is honest with himself he sees his father as an old fool who was willing to give in to this wayward child to the demise of the rest of the family...the community.

With these two difficult relationships, I pity the father.

He is dealing with not one, but two difficult sons.

One son is eaten up with vice...the other son is puffed up on his own virtue.

But this father who seeks to find lost sons, is an odd character, too.

By all standards of the culture and the time, he is foolish.

He gives up his property, his life, his *bios*- gives everything away.

He seems an unwise manager of his personal affairs.

He gives his two sons his trust and their freedom.

By giving the boys their inheritance,

he allows his son the freedom to take responsibility or not.

Even as the son who is left behind keeps watch over the family, the animals, the livelihood, the father watches down the road to see if he might come back home. He and the wife pray fervently each night for the son hearing no word of his well-being- no email, no text message, no letter. You know she was looking out the kitchen window just as much as the father.

The parents must have thought it would have been worse to not allow the son to go out and learn for himself the ways of the world and the realities of providing for himself.

They knew that he would make their lives at home hard until he learned for himself.

With all that worrying over the long from home son, they probably paid little attention to the older son going about the daily business, doing what needed to be done, doing his part and more than his part to keep the family taken care of.

But what kind of father does that?

- What kind of father allows his children to make their own choices and stands by to see what might happen?
- What kind of father offers grace before requiring repentance?
- What kind of father lets go of inhibition, not caring what the neighbors will think as he foolishly chases after a son who has not lived up to his expectations, his potential?
- What kind of father invites the dutiful, angry son to put down his work and come to a party and eat with his brother?

Our Father...this is about a God who will go after both boys:

The one lost in his own vice

And the one puffed up on his own virtue

Then he sets a feast before them so they might sit down together at table
WITH HIM and in the presence of a brother turned enemy
Setting aside old resentment and self-loathing
So they might enjoy the reality of being welcomed home again
enjoying the taste of GRACE-
undeserved
sacrificially given.

The Father is coming out to meet you and me....

Do you hear the music and the dancing?

Are you ready to go to the party and to be welcomed as God's child?