

“LIVING LENT as People of the Resurrection: PROCLAIM”
Luke 15:1-3, 11-32

- 1** Now the tax collectors and sinners were all gathering around to hear Jesus.
- 2** But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, “This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.”
- 3** Then Jesus told them this parable: (the lost sheep, the lost coin, and continues)
- 11** “There was a man who had two sons.
- 12** The younger one said to his father, ‘Father, give me my share of the estate.’
So he divided his property between them.
- 13** “Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living.
- 14** After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need.
- 15** So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs.
- 16** He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything.
- 17** “When he came to his senses, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired servants have food to spare, and here I am starving to death!
- 18** I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you.
- 19** I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired servants.’
- 20** So he got up and went to his father. “But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.
- 21** “The son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you.
I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’
- 22** “But the father said to his servants, ‘Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him.
Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet.
- 23** Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let’s have a feast and celebrate.
- 24** For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’ So they began to celebrate.
- 25** “Meanwhile, the older son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing.
- 26** So he called one of the servants and asked him what was going on.
- 27** ‘Your brother has come,’ he replied, ‘and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.’
- 28** “The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him.
- 29** But he answered his father, ‘Look! All these years I’ve been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders.
Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends.
- 30** But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!’
- 31** “ ‘My son,’ the father said, ‘you are always with me, and everything I have is yours.
- 32** But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’

Introduction

Why do we human beings cry? Shed tears? “There is a surprising dearth of hard facts about so fundamental a part of the human experience.” The March 7 issue of *Time* magazine explores the latest attempts to explain.

Charles Darwin declared emotional tears “purposeless” about 150 years ago. But new research shows that tears appear to elicit a response in other people. Babies cry for attention; and so do children, youth and adults. Tears activate compassion. Tears are a signal that others can see.

Research done in 37 countries show interesting statistics. Women cry 2 to 5 times a month; men once every two months. 74% of crying takes place at home; 9% in public places; 6% at work or school. 35% cry alone; 30% with one other person present; 35% with at least two others. The most popular time for tears is 7-10 p.m.

When and why do you cry... or not? Loss or separation is the highest reason for crying and is steady in all ages. The likelihood of crying from or for empathy and sympathy consistently increases from infancy to childhood to adolescence to adulthood to old age.

And lastly, why most teens and adults cry and some don't is about human bonding. Preliminary research finds that people who don't cry are different from those who do. A study at the University of Kassel in Germany reported that “The noncrying people had a tendency to withdraw and described their relationship experiences as less connected.” The tearless also experience more negative aggressive feelings like rage, anger and disgust than those who cried.

This morning we have come to the last section of Luke 15, commonly known as “The Parable of the Prodigal (wasteful) Son.”

I. The Confrontation (Good News? Or Bad News?)

Now the tax collectors and sinners were all gathering around to hear Jesus. But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, “This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.” It's “this man” Jesus versus the religious leaders who are all about The Law.

Ken Bailey is the premier scholar on Middle Eastern interpretation of Jesus. Having lived there in three or four countries for over 40 years, he brings tremendous insight for us Westerners as we read a parable like this one.

To welcome and eat with someone is to identify with, affirm, befriend, express connection. Several times the Law-Keepers were upset and even furious with Jesus. In telling them these three stories (really as one connected extended parable), Jesus is saying, “It's far worse than you think! I have come to forgive sinners, to seek and to save the lost, to redeem relationship between anyone and the God who created them and loves them with an unexpected love.” Bailey notes how the “father” in the prodigal story clearly represents Jesus. Let's see why.

II. What Should the Father Have Done?

With this confrontation between Jesus and the Religious, he tells them: “There was a man who had two sons. The younger one said to his father, ‘Father, give me my share of the estate.’ So he divided his property between them.” Excuse me! The brat just told his father to “Drop dead!” The slap across the face would not be an open-handed tap but a forceful backhand. Yet, the father gave his son what he wanted. Word got around town as the son sells stuff to have cash. And the father takes on the shame that was sure to come his way. That’s what Jesus does for us, you know. God gives us life and we tend to squander it. Jesus comes to redeem us, buy us back.

The we hear, “Your brother has come and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.” My father did what? “The older brother became angry and refused to go in.” It says, “The father went out and pleaded with him.” Excuse me!! with double exclamation points. With much of the community celebrating with music and dance, “How dare you shame me by refusing to come in...” an even deeper insult! Here comes the jaw braking punch. Right? But here again the father takes the shame upon himself.

Having broken the Law, both sons should be punished harshly by the father and the whole community. With justified anger, drive them out of the house; drive them out of the community. Yet the lawyers would insist that Jesus has it absolutely backwards. Jesus tells how the father somehow is able to re-process anger into grace. Why? Because Relationship is way more important than Law.

Daring to come home, the younger son would say, “Make me like one of your hired servants... so I can make enough money to pay you back what I have wasted?” The prodigal son knew that he would have to make it right, pay it back, solve the problem on his own. Yet in the story and in our lives as well, Jesus will not allow that. The Lord knows that it is impossible for anyone (including tax collectors and sinners) to pay him back. So, “While he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him... This is my son... dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.” Imagine the tears flowing from this wounded father. Imagine when Jesus wept over Jerusalem.

Enter big brother: “All these years I’ve been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders (hear how I have kept the Law). Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours...” Boo hoo! “Get your butt inside and honor me properly!” Yet Jesus will not allow this for the just-as-lost older son (i.e. the religious leaders, the Law-Keepers).

“You are my son! You are always with me. Everything I have is yours. But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours (note the turn of phrase: ‘this son of yours... this brother of

yours') was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found." Relationship! father-son; father-son; brother-brother... Relationship is the most important.

This father is willing to be humiliated to reclaim, to redeem these two sons whom he loves. He wants *shalom*, reconciliation all at his own cost. And yes, that's what Jesus does for us.

Conclusion

Remember the sheep lost in distant country as was the younger brother. The Good shepherd searches. Remember the coin lost in the house as was the older brother. The father pleads with him! Whether far or near, Jesus seeks, searches, and rejoices with all of heaven when "one sinner repents," when anyone simply accepts the Lord's unexpected, undeserved, amazing love.

Luke 15 is known as "the gospel within the Gospel." Did the Pharisees and teachers of the Law get it? Most people don't. No tears there! What about you? Do you get it? Have you cried, even wept in knowing this love, this most important relationship in life?

Let us pray for one another and proclaim this good news, this new life.