



This week's Touchpoint is being read by Jim Hanson's OLDER brother, Craig, while Jim is traveling in Israel and Jordan for 2 weeks. Jim wrote this for us before he left.

Dad Always Liked You Best – TouchPoint for March 27, 2019

Luke 15 New (NRSV) The Parable of the Lost Sheep

¹⁵ Now all the tax collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to him. ² And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, “This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them.”

¹¹ Then Jesus said, “There was a man who had two sons. ¹² 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. ¹³ A 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. ¹⁴ When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that country, and he began to be in need. ¹⁵ 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. ¹⁶ He would gladly have filled himself with the pods that the pigs were eating; and no one gave him anything.

¹⁷ 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! ¹⁸ I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; ¹⁹ I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands.”’ ²⁰ 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.

²¹ 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.’ ²² 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. ²³ And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; ²⁴ for 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. ²⁶ He called one of the slaves and asked what was going on. ²⁷ He replied, ‘Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has got him back safe and sound.’ ²⁸ Then he became angry and refused to go in. His father came out and began to plead with him. ²⁹ 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. ³⁰ But when this son of yours came back, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fatted calf for him!’ ³¹ Then the father said to him, ‘Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. ³² 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.’”

Grace and Peace from the Mystery in whom we live and move and have our being.

“The story of the Prodigal Son is the story of a younger son ... a younger brother... who runs off with his half of the family’s wealth and squanders it on loose women and loose living. He does this until it all runs out and realizes what he has done ... and comes back with his tail between his legs ... sorrowful and penitent ... a perfect example of a humble heart... a role model for...”

OK, I've had it. I can't do this anymore. I can't take this. What a sad sack of sheep manure this is. So Jim asked me to get up and read his TouchPoints while he is traveling in Israel and Jordan for 2 weeks. And yes, I was more than happy to get up and read what he wrote last week about the fig tree and the gardener. The heroic landscaper/gardener who saves the tree and shows grace. I could get into that one. I like stories about a loving and gracious landscaper/gardener having run a landscaping business most of my life.

But this? This is beyond the pale. Why is everything told from the younger son's perspective? What about us older brothers? That younger son/brother didn't come back repentant and humble, he was just using our dad like he did before. He keeps playing fast and loose with this family. When is he going to get his due? Apparently NEVER! He gets away with it! I can't take it anymore. I am so tired of this parable! Someone needs to speak up on behalf of the older brothers, the older siblings of the world who are respectful and responsible to their parents and elders. Can I get an AMEN—Eric? So I'm ripping up Jim's touchpoint and giving you the real story from an older son's, an older sibling's perspective.

Now the phrase "Prodigal Son" is defined in the dictionary as:

A wayward son who squanders his inheritance but returns home to find that his father forgives him.

I want to repeat that:

A wayward son who squanders his inheritance but returns home to find that his father forgives him.

So I can understand why this is called the parable of the Prodigal Son. The younger son didn't realize what he had. He squandered it and took advantage of it. Used and abused it. He didn't have a clue. He's an idiot and a moron. And I don't think he will ever get it. He squandered more than an inheritance. He squandered a relationship and his family.

But why not call this the parable *The One True Son*. That's me you know. I'm the good son. I'm the one who has lived by all the rules. But where has that gotten me? On the outside looking in. All of you older siblings know what I'm talking about. You youngest siblings will never know. You youngest ones get away with everything. You don't think the rules apply to you. And now you have a bible passage to back it up. Us older ones always knew mom and dad loved you best.

You need proof? Just look at what my Father does when my brother comes home! He rewards my brother and chastises me! ARE YOU KIDDING ME? HOW MESSED UP IS THAT?

All my life I have been the good and obedient child. All my life I've colored inside the lines. All my life I've stayed in my lane. So when my dad came out to talk to me, I let him have it. I told him exactly what I thought. No more *Mister Nice Guy*. No more obedient and subservient son. If dad is going to reward bad behavior, then I am going to give him all that he can handle. And so I did. I told him exactly what I thought. And you know what he said back? "***Child, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours.***"

Wait a second! What? All my life I have sought the approval of my father, are you telling me it has been there all along. All my life I have sought the approval of the Divine, are you telling me it has been there all along. What's that definition of the prodigal son again: **A wayward son who squanders his inheritance but returns home to find that his father forgives him.**

Maybe we are all prodigal sons—prodigal children. Maybe we have all squandered the Mystery's grace, some of us through loose, fearless living and some of us through uptight, fearful living. We have all squandered our inheritance of grace because we can't get outside of our reward/punishment world. And we have brought that into our relationship with the Mystery.

You see, here's my dad, my heavenly Father, the Mystery, telling me that what he has, has always been mine. It's almost as if he is calling me the Prodigal Son. It's almost as if he is telling me I have squandered my inheritance through uptight, fearful living; that I have squandered my inheritance by thinking it's a reward instead of gift.

Is this what St. Paul means when he says in Galatians, that **"neither uncircumcision, NOR circumcision count for anything...what counts is the NEW CREATION."** We can understand that uncircumcision counts for nothing, but shouldn't circumcision count for something? Shouldn't our godly religious acts have some reward? Shouldn't my being the good and obedient child count for something MORE? Is my Father trying to tell me that neither fast and loose living NOR good and obedient living count for anything MORE in his household?

And the reason for that is, because there is NO COUNTING in the family of God. There is NO COUNTING in the Mystery in which we live and move and have our being. A world with NO COUNTING AT ALL! What a **NEW CREATION** that would be. What's that definition of the prodigal son again: **A wayward son who squanders his inheritance but returns home to find that his father forgives him.**

Perhaps this is a properly titled parable after all. No wait, I take that back. It shouldn't be called the "Parable of the Prodigal Son" but rather, the "Parable of the Prodigal Sons" or the "Parable of the Prodigal Children." Because you see, we are all children of the Mystery and we have all squandered its grace. We have taken advantage of it and abused it. ***"If there is only grace then I can do whatever I want"*** —the youngest son. Or we have bastardized it and turned it into a game of reward and punishment: ***"God is gonna get you if you don't straighten up like I have."*** —the oldest son.

We have bastardized the Mystery's grace, the Father's love. But guess what, there are no bastard children in the family of God. And the door into the house is always open and the feast never ends. Deniers and betrayers, doubters and cowards are welcome—*Think Judas, Peter, Thomas and the rest.*

Those who play fast and loose with Divine grace are welcome. ***"For the prostitutes and the tax collectors will enter the kingdom before you."*** Uptight Pharisees and holier than thou fundamentalists are welcome. ***"For the prostitutes and the tax collectors will enter the kingdom before you."***

We will still enter, we just have to wait our turn. No, the door into the house is always open and the feast never ends. What's that definition of the prodigal child again: **A wayward child who squanders their inheritance but returns home to find that their parent forgives them.**

Maybe it's time for all of us prodigals to come inside.

The feast is ready. The bread is broken. the drink is poured.

WELCOME HOME!!!

Amen.