

THE PRODIGAL SON

General Comments:

After the first evening in which the pilgrims ask the question, “Who am I?” They now hear of God’s great love for them. This meditation is given in chapel on Friday morning. The theme for the day is “Grace Revealed.” This meditation begins to introduce the theme of God’s incredible grace. While most meditations are given like a short sermon, this one is designed to be a guided meditation.

Guided Meditation:

The theme for today is “**Grace Revealed.**” As we begin to look at God’s grace revealed to us, we will take a look at the story of the Prodigal Son. There are many ways of engaging the scriptures and wrestling with the meaning. One way with which you may not be so familiar is a guided meditation. I invite you to relax and focus your attention in such a way that you can listen carefully as I guide your meditating.

“There was a man who had two sons; and the younger of them said to his father, ‘Give me the share of property that belongs to me.’ [This is to say, “Please give me the share that would be mine if you had died.”]

The old father looked into his son’s eyes and saw that they spoke volumes. His eyes said, “Father, my life is complete boredom. I can never be fulfilled as long as I remain here. I have to find meaning for my life. I believe the cause of my frustration is you - your rules, your regulations, your limitations. I have to find myself.”

The father thought, “He can never be my son by force. A forced son is no son at all. He prefers **THINGS** to me. He feels they will make him the man he wants to be, so he should have the thing.”

With tears running down his cheeks, he gave the young man his share.

The young man was excited. “The future holds tremendous possibilities for me. Life is going to be different! I am going to be a fulfilled man! I am going to be free!”

So a few days later he gathered up everything and went to a far country. The distance was not far in miles, but far in relationship. The son had decided that the father was as good as dead, and treated him that way. He wanted to live his life completely apart from the father, enjoying himself, his gifts, his money.

So, he began living and searching for meaning. “I am going to get it this time”, he said happily.

But, somehow life refused to be exactly what he wanted it to be. So he started using props. He used money as a prop. He used music as a prop. He used friendship as a prop. And he found that the more he used the props, the more props he needed.

Increasingly, he felt that life was empty. So he had to seek ways of filling it. That is why he overspent money. He was not seeking to be bad. All he wanted was a life full of meaning and reality and joy. Therefore, he was going to use everything he had in order to get what he wanted.

He spent every asset he had: *all* the love he had; *all* the emotions he had; *all* the friendships he had; *everything* that made him a man, he spent. He ran through the entire account of his life and emptied his human bank completely. He *emptied* sex; he *emptied* desire; he *emptied* appetite.

When he had spent everything, a great famine arose in that country. “What terrible timing!” he thought.

Just when you need to call upon your gifts and find control, you turn around and find there is a famine in every department of your life! Self image? *Empty*. Desire? *Gone*. Self control? *Run wild*. “How did I empty myself?” you ask. “I never intended *this!*”

The farther away the son got from his father, the farther away he got from himself and from the very meaning he so eagerly sought. He was confused, hungry, tired, starving, lonely, and shattered. He was naked, very guilty, and the distance from his father seemed unbridgeable.

The young man thought he could earn a living, so he went and attached himself to one of the landowners. But he lacked qualification, so the man said he didn't need him. Like a drowning man reaching out to grasp anything at all, the young man cried out desperately, “Help me!”

“Well then, go down into the valley and look after my swine,” said the landowner.

So there he stood, the once-respectable young man, by the pigs. They were wallowing in the mud and enjoying it, eating pods to the fill.

All around is utter silence: No music, No comfort, No friends, No prosperity, No home, No father, No life.

He left home to enjoy life, but now life is enjoying him! He left to find freedom, but now he is an absolute slave of circumstance.

The swine were having a feast: worms, pods, and all. And all the while, hunger was really biting him. He was almost fainting. He began to hate the fact that he was a human and not a hog?

What remains? Just rags and tatters, dirt and loneliness.

At that point, Jesus tells us, the young man “came to himself.” It was not simply that he came to his senses. There was something more that drew him. It was the memory of *love*: A father’s love.

It was *love* that brought hope in a hopeless situation. And it was this *love* that impelled the son to take a very simple step. He said, “I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, ‘Father, I have sinned’”

That was all. He planned to explain to his father that he didn’t deserve to be a son, just a field-worker, a slave, for even *THAT* would be better, he knew, than dying in the far country.

Have you thought how hard that journey back was for the son? Every step was heavy. “How am I going to appear?”, he asked himself. “I went away rich and here I am, broken and starving.”

A voice inside him probably kept saying. “Don’t go! You are no good, stay here and die!” But it was a devilish voice, and he tried to get it out of his mind. Another voice, the voice of love, kept saying, “Come.”

“While he was yet at a distance, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and embraced him.” He threw his arms around the young master with his marks of loss, his wounds and his filth”

And the wanderer, in the arms of love, began his confession [this is the real place of repentance] in God’s arms: “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.”

But the father was hardly listening to the confession. It was not the words; it was the son he was interested in!

Already the father was addressing the servants: “Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him. Put a ring on his hand and shoes on his feet. Bring the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and make merry. For this my son was *dead*, and is alive again; he was *lost* and is found.”

You may remember that there is another son in this story as well, an older brother who is standing outside. He refuses to go in. This gracious, loving father comes out to him and pleads with him to come and join the party, to come and celebrate the father’s joy. The story ends, and we do not know whether he comes to the party or not.

The father in this story is God. He waits to welcome *you* home.