

“THE FATHER WHO CAN’T STOP GIVING”
Luke 15:1-3, 11-32; 2 Corinthians 5:16-21

The story before us is a familiar one. A man had two sons. The older son was the kind any parent would beam with pride about. Respectful, diligent, always lending a hand. Chores? Done before they were even asked. No backtalk, just quiet, reliable honesty. He excelled in school, was a regular at church, and even volunteered to help those less fortunate. The whole village admired him, and by extension, his father—a chip off the old block, indeed! “What a blessing,” they’d say. “Surely, God has great plans for such a fine young man,” they’d say... But it’s wise not to judge a book by its cover, because outward appearances can be deceiving, and God’s ways are often not our ways.

Now, the younger son... that was a different story altogether. “A slacker”, some might say. Rebellious. Chores left undone, his father’s authority constantly questioned. Days spent idle on the street corner, money squandered. School suspensions, brawls, disruptions even in church, and nights lost to drunken antics. In the estimation of the village: “A burden,” “a shame to his father.” And to many, he seemed a hopeless case. A picture of wasted potential, a source of constant grief. But here’s the thing: God’s grace doesn’t operate within the confines of our expectations. He sees beyond the surface, into the heart.

Then came that day the younger son decided he’d had enough. “Give me freedom!” he demanded. “No more rules, no more chores, just life on my own terms!” And to fund this great escape, he demanded his inheritance early, forcing his father to liquidate savings and take out a second mortgage the family farm.

Without a backward glance, without even a thought for the hardship he was causing, without so much as a goodbye... he left home.

Back at the father’s house, things were different. Every evening, just as the sun began to set, the father would stand at the window, his gaze fixed on the distant road. A deep sadness on his face, lost in deep thought. The older son couldn’t quite grasp the depth of his father’s sorrow, only that it was a daily ritual, a silent vigil. He didn’t understand that the father’s heart ached for his son who was lost.

Then, the whispers started. Reports filtered back to the father, accounts of his younger son’s reckless fall from grace. The town, always quick to judge, declared the father blessed to be free from such a burden. Even the older brother, with perhaps a hint of self-righteousness, felt relief at the troublemaker’s absence. But each day, as the shadows lengthened, the father’s gaze remained fixed on the horizon, his heart yearning for the lost sheep, a yearning the town and even the older brother couldn’t understand...

Then, the stories took a darker turn. The younger son, once so full of arrogant swagger, was now penniless, living on the streets, his short-lived riches wasted. The “friends” who flocked to him in his extravagance left him all alone and discarded. The news reached the village that he was laboring in a pig farmer’s field, a job so demeaning, it spoke of complete ruin. “He’s reaping what he sowed,” the townspeople said. Even the older brother, with a hint of satisfaction, smirked, “He’s found his proper place.” But the father, his heart heavy with sorrow, continued his daily vigil at the window, his gaze fixed on the distant road, a silent testament to a love that refused to die.

Then, one day, as the father manned his post at the window, he saw him! His son, returning. shabby, emaciated, his clothes in tatters, his hair and beard a tangled mess. But, a father’s heart knows its own son. With a rush of joy, he hurried from the house, his old legs carrying him with unexpected speed. He ran through the town, oblivious of the stares of the neighbors, until he reached his son.

And then, despite the reek of the pig sty, he embraced him, held him close, kissed him with a fierce, steadfast love. “You’re home!” he cried, cutting off the son’s stuttering apologies. “Never mind the words, son. We’ll celebrate! A feast for the whole town! You’re home, and that’s all that matters!”

But then, the older brother came forward, his voice filled with resentment. “A party?” “A celebration for him? For the one...

- ... who brought shame on us all?
- ... who wallowed in sin?
- ... who abandoned us, leaving us to bear the burden of his recklessness?
- ... who cares only for himself, who wished us nothing but ill?
- ... who's brought us only grief, and who likely returns only to exploit your generosity again?

You're throwing a party for him?” And here we have a picture of this son’s heart's and his resistance to grace. For him it’s about outward performance.

“But what about me? I’ve been here all along, faithful and obedient. I’ve never complained, at least not to your face. I’ve done everything you asked, even when I didn’t want to. He’s a disgrace; I’m the loyal son. When do I get to enjoy the fruits of my labor? What about me?” How easily self-righteousness can blind us to the Father’s boundless love.

And the father, his voice soft yet firm, replied, “My dearly loved son, I love you. With a love that knows no bounds. Everything I possess is yours, always has been, and always will be. But my love for your brother doesn’t diminish my love for you. He was lost, not just physically, but spiritually. For a time, I feared I’d never see him again, that he was lost to me forever. But now, by God’s grace, he’s returned. I’ve forgiven him with a forgiveness reflecting the very grace we receive from our Heavenly Father. I don’t know if he’ll stumble again, or if he’ll misuse my love, but my love for him remains, as unwavering as my love for you. So, come, join the celebration... For the joy of a lost son—your brother found. Our house, once empty, is full again.” Here’s a reflection of the Father’s heart, rejoicing over every repentant sinner.

And the celebration continued late into the night as the townspeople, witness a love that defied all expectations, and marveled at the father’s boundless forgiveness. The younger son, overwhelmed by grace...

And the father, even amidst the celebration, his gaze drawn once more to the window, a quiet sadness remaining in his eyes. He stood there, a silent sentinel, still looking, still waiting, for that son, the older son, to come in. A reminder that God’s love extends to all, and that even those closest to us, those who seem most righteous, can still wander from the Father’s embrace. A call for all to come and celebrate the Father’s unending love.

Now, do you remember the opening words of our text? It was the outcasts, the tax collectors, the sinners – those society deemed unworthy – who were drawn to Jesus, eager to hear his words. But the Pharisees and scribes, those who considered themselves righteous, grumbled with disapproval. “Look at him!” they grumbled. “He welcomes sinners, even shares meals with them!” And so, to reveal the heart of God, to challenge their self-righteousness, Jesus told them this parable... so that they back then, and we today, might understand that the love and forgiveness of our Heavenly Father isn’t earned by our faithfulness, our works, or our perceived goodness. The younger son’s actions couldn’t change that love, nor could the older son’s self-righteousness earn it. Our Father’s love is pure gift, pure grace, offered freely, unconditionally, and eternally.

Now the Pharisees and scribes weren't naturally evil. They were, like us, prone to misunderstanding the very nature of God's love, clinging to the idea that righteousness could be earned, that grace was deserved. But God's love is not a transaction or reward for good behavior. You don't need to do anything to prove your worthiness. Just repent, and turn back to the Father, to receive His love and forgiveness. Because He stands ready, arms outstretched, eager to embrace you, and restore you to your rightful place as His beloved child.

Maybe, like the younger son, you've squandered the gifts God has given you, wandered from the path, and found yourself lost. Or maybe, like the older son, you've maintained an outward appearance of faithfulness, while harboring anger, resentment, and pride in your heart. Whatever your past, whoever you are now, a feast awaits you beyond earthly conception. Not the fattened calf, but the very Body and Blood of Jesus Christ, given and shed for you. A feast of forgiveness, life, and salvation, offered freely to sinners, that we might be restored as sons and daughters of God. There is no greater banquet, no greater love, no greater gift. Come, receive it.

This is how we know the depth of our Father's longing for our return, how we know He stands ready to embrace us with boundless love: Jesus, on the cross, displayed that love in its most profound form. As St. Paul proclaimed, "For our sake [God] made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." We, the prodigal sons and daughters, are welcomed home, forgiven and restored, because of our Savior's prodigal love. In Christ's sacrifice, we witness the very heart of God, reaching out to reclaim us as His own.

It was that unwavering, relentless love, that drew the younger son back. Bruised, broken, and cast aside by the world, he returned, not to face the wrath he deserved, but to encounter a prodigal love, a lavish love, a love that surpassed all expectation and all hope. He returned to a love that mirrored the very heart of God, a love that welcomes the lost and restores the broken.

And it is that same love—that prodigal, lavish love—that yearns for the older son's return. A love that seeks to melt the icy grip of self-interest, self-satisfaction, and self-righteousness that hardened his heart. A love the older son, in his pride, has never truly known, but a love his Father longs to give. A love that invites us, to lay down our burdens and embrace the grace that sets us free.

And it is that same love that invites you to return with a heart laid bare, confessing, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am unworthy to be called your son/your daughter." And in that moment of humble confession, He doesn't condemn, but He declares, "I forgive you all your sins. Come to the feast! I've prepared it for you. I rejoice that you're here. You're home!"

Indeed, we are home. Home in the house of our Father where grace abounds, where forgiveness flows freely, and where love reigns eternal. In the Name of Jesus, Amen.