Eating Reconciliation u Luke 15:11-32 u Trinity 3

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The word ‘reconciliation’ may be an unfamiliar word for some, but essentially it’s the Gospel in a nutshell. Reconciliation happens between two different people who’ve changed previous enmity and strife into friendship – restoring what had been previously lost. Sinners have been reconciled to God, because the sin which caused the enmity and strife between God and sinners has been put to death by Christ’s death and resurrection.

The Prodigal Son parable has been described by some as the greatest summary of Christian doctrine in one parable, because of the reconciliation between the son and the father, resulting in a feast beyond comprehension.

You know the story - the younger prodigal son asked for his father’s inheritance before he died. How rude! If you’re a middle easterner, impossible! An author, Kenneth Bailey, has spent over 20 years in the Middle East to further his understanding of biblical culture. He asked several Middle Easterners if they’ve ever witnessed such a request in their village. He records the typical conversation as this:

“Has anyone ever made such a request in your village?”

“Never!”

“Could anyone ever make such a request?”

“Impossible!”

“If anyone ever did, what would happen?”

“His Father would beat him, of course!”

“Why?”

“This request means – he wants his father to die!”

Nonetheless, the gracious Father in the parable doesn’t beat His son, but rather gives Him what He asks for, and lets him go – not because the Father doesn’t love his son, but because the son doesn’t love his Father. Actually, the Father loves His Son greatly, and renders himself dead for the sake of his son.

Now that the prodigal son can live his lavish lifestyle, he’s free from the burden of his Father’s household. He’s free from the burden of his Father’s life. He’s free to establish himself.

That’s when things turn south - the prodigal son wasted his father’s inheritance. On what, we don’t know, but we could imagine - parties, prostitutes, gambling, expensive luxuries or other vices. Regardless, the prodigal son was careless with the father’s inheritance. He didn’t live as a son of the Father. He divorced himself of any familial responsibility to “free” himself, only to be enslaved to his own selfish pursuits.

He rejected His family because he didn’t want them. He didn’t love them, he just used them. And using people is the opposite of love. He was willing to use and forfeit his sonship status to live enslaved to himself.

How could anyone do that? It seems so cruel.

The prodigal son does it because he’s selfish. He lacks eternal love. He’s corrupted by sin, death, and the devil. He’s been duped by Satan into believing that it’s better to be served rather than serve. He’s been duped to embrace a lifestyle that rejects God-given, God-ordered familial relationships. He’s been duped into believing that family is seen as restrictive rather than a haven.

Have you rejected your family for similar reasons? Or church family? It’s often more subtle than how it’s described in the parable. It doesn’t have to look like the prodigal son, because we may use people in exchange for what they can give us. We say things that demonstrates that we see our family as restrictive to us, not a haven. As a burden, not a gift.

We hear it all the time – men referring to their wife and kids as the “old ball-and-chain” – because apparently families enslave husbands? There could be arguments between family members because their bull-headed will is stronger than their love. And when the going really gets tough, and the oppressiveness of the family just gets too much, you get duped into believing that divorce from it all is your freedom.

That’s what the prodigal son did. He got duped. He wasted his familial relationship. But he got exactly what he wanted all along – separation from his family. And look where he ended up – he put his freedom to work real well in that pig pen. Feeding pigs is considered the lowliest of jobs, and it didn’t even pay well. He became so hungry, the pig’s food even looked appetizing. He even begged on the streets, but no one gave him anything. It’s official, he’s hit rock-bottom. The freedom he’s always wanted has rendered him empty of food, love, and a family.

Having seen what’s happened, He starts the steps of repentance. He recognizes what he has done. And he recognizes that his family is a haven, not a burden. He recognizes the graciousness of His father, who’s servants were given more than enough bread to fill their stomachs. He figured, if my Father is gracious in giving them food, maybe he will be gracious to give me a job as a servant. So, the prodigal son rehearsed what he was going to say – “Father, I’ve sinned badly. I’ve wished my Father dead and I know that means that I can’t retain my status as your son. Simply, take me back to be a lowly servant, that I may survive.”

As the prodigal walks along rehearsing his confession, the Father sees him and has compassion on him. He sprints to meet him! When he got there, he hugged his son, and kissed him! The prodigal son with deep humility confessed his egregious sin. The Father was overjoyed with his confession, and called for a joyous celebration! “Put a robe on my son’s hand, and a ring on his finger. And for goodness sake, put shoes on his feet! Clothe him in everything I can give!” Says the Father. “Not only that, but sacrifice the fattened calf, and let’s celebrate! Because my son was lost, but now, he’s found!”

And so the feast went on.

Jesus teaches us through this parable that reconciliation with our heavenly Father comes through eating - through this celebratory feast. This parable is a story about God reconciling sinners to Himself. Though we constantly squander our heavenly Father’s inheritance by cheapening God’s costly grace by taking advantage of His graciousness, our Father still runs to us, hears our confession of our sin, and then throws a banquet feast for us. Because through this, we are given forgiveness through the sacrificial death of Christ on the cross. Jesus Himself is the fattened calf we eat in this feast. Because through it we obtain forgiveness, life, salvation, and we are gifted back our status as children of God. What I’ve just described to you, is the liturgy. You are the prodigal son each time we feast together – it could be each week if you’d just have it! Because you confess your sins, asking for the father’s mercy ever since the very beginning of the service – you are given God’s mercy all throughout the service, culminating in this feast of reconciliation between you and God the Father – reconciled by Christ’s sacrificial death to atone for sin.

Though we may see ourselves as the prodigal son, we may also be the older brother as well. The older brother isn’t necessarily jealous of his brother, but he’s jealous of the feast – that something like that wasn’t given to him and his friends. The older brother threw a hissy fit and refused to join the feast – no celebration of life, no celebrating what had been lost now being found, no celebrating the graciousness of the Father. Rather than being reconciled through the feast, he enslaved himself to his own selfishness, and refused to celebrate.

For some, maybe this is a more accurate description – despising the feast because we don’t see it as beneficial. Or that the feast isn’t a part of reconciliation – that the Lord’s Supper is insignificant to salvation.

May it never be. Today, and each Sunday, the Lord gives His body and blood to us. And this is the meal which feeds, nourishes, and strengthens our faith. Why? Because Christ has promised. The new covenant is given through the blood of Christ. The new covenant is that with repenting hearts desiring to restored to the family of God, we are restored, confirmed, strengthened, and established in the heavenly family.

May God reconcile us to Himself and us to each other.

Now, let’s do what families do, and feast together.

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