

“Full to the Brim: Prodigal Grace” Rev. Michele Ward
Luke 15:1-3, 11b-32; 2 Corinthians 5:16-21
Lent IV Year C March 27, 2022
Brown Memorial Park Avenue Presbyterian Church Baltimore, MD

The last time I preached on this text at Brown Memorial it was the Fall of 2018. The Brett Kavanaugh hearings were in full swing, and I was in my first few months here in ministry and a new Baltimorean. What an odd coincidence that the same week I am preparing to preach on the story of the Prodigal Son, our country is in the midst of the Ketanji Brown Jackson hearings for another Supreme Court seat. The gift of the Revised Common Lectionary, and the gift of this parable, is that we return to it again and again. While the parable does not change, the circumstances of our lives and the political landscape around us does. Join me in exploring the parable once again, and see what Jesus has say.

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The Gospel reading comes from the book of Luke. Listen now for a word from God.

Now all the tax-collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to him. And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, ‘This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them.’

So he told them this parable:

Then Jesus said, ‘There was a man who had two sons.

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. 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. When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that country, and he began to be in need. 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. He would gladly have filled himself with the pods that the pigs were eating; and no one gave him anything.

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

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.

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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.”

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. And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!” And they began to celebrate.

Now his elder son was in the field; and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. He called one of the slaves and asked what was going on.

He replied, “Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has got him back safe and sound.” Then he became angry and refused to go in. His father came out and began to plead with him.

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. But when this son of yours came back, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fatted calf for him!”

Then the father said to him, “Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. 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.” ’

The Word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

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Does anyone even know what the word *prodigal* means, anyway? It seems like one of the non-words in our Christian vocabulary, a word we say often in church but do not understand. I assumed it had a negative connotation because it describes the younger son’s behavior.

And, depending on how we use the word, it does describe unlikeable traits - recklessness, wastefulness, imprudence. To my surprise, prodigal does not have to mean all of those unlikeable traits. It can also mean extravagant, lavish, generous.

But the real secret of this parable is that everyone's a little bit prodigal. And the grace of God is the most prodigal of all. God’s grace is extravagant, lavish, and generous. And it is reckless, wasteful, and imprudent.

What else would grace be if it wasn’t all of those things?

Walk through the passage.

“Touched By An Angel” by Maya Angelou

We, unaccustomed to courage/exiles from delight/live coiled in shells of loneliness/until love leaves its high holy temple/and comes into our sight/to liberate us into life.

The younger son and his awakening to his need for grace.

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Love arrives/and in its train come ecstasies/old memories of pleasure/ancient histories of pain./Yet if we are bold,/love strikes away the chains of fear/from our souls.

The father and the deep well of love for his children.

We are weaned from our timidity/In the flush of love's light/we dare be brave/And suddenly we see/that love costs all we are/and will ever be./Yet it is/only love/which sets us free.

The older son and his awakening to his need for grace