

*"A Confession: 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you.
I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' " Luke 15:18*

Sermon Notes by the Rev. Arnold A. Bush, Priest in Charge of Episcopal Church of the Epiphany, Tallassee, AL 36078, IV Lent, March 10.2013.

Text: Parable of the Waiting Father, Luke 15: 1-3, 11-31; James 5:15 *"If they have sinned, they will be forgiven. Therefore, confess you sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed."*
"Blessed are those who mourn for they will be comforted". (Mt. 5:4 also, translated: "sorrowful": an attitude that causes awareness of one's own errors.)

Introduction

A little review on this series of sermons on prayer. Do you recall the six ACTS of prayer? They are: Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, Supplication for others (intercession), and supplication for ourselves (Petition) and Listening. I will be speaking on Confession. This sermon is important because some of the concepts will bring you into a deeper relationship with God. Also, confession brings a sense of peace into our life and promote reconciliation with others. Let's look at confession in the context of the *Parable of the Waiting Father*, also called the *Parable of the Prodigal son*.

II Some of the Key Concepts in the Parable

The younger son goes to his father seeking his inheritance, so his father gives him a large sum of money. The younger son goes away living with harlots, throws his money away. In the famine comes in this far country, so he works at a hog farm. He is hungry and willing to eat the pods that the pigs were eating and no one gave him anything. So he comes to his senses. He knew he would have to walk through the village before meeting his father at home so he rehearses his speech.

Sometimes the parable is so familiar to us we miss the deeper meanings. I have heard many interpretations and responses such as... "Oh he was just sewing his wild oats, he just went to the French Quarters where he stayed too long, or lived and undisciplined life and eventually came home to his father". Using the research of Kenneth Bailey who studied Middle Eastern villages for over 20 years has discovered some deep theological truths and application.

II What has the Younger Son Done?

Some translations: New English Bible: *"reckless living"*; NIV *"Squandered his wealth in wild living and squandered his property in loose living."*

This far country could be appealing with "big city life", with sex, hot music and dance, a sort of "eat, drink and be merry" type of living.

As a parent who had been offended maybe you may want to take him to the "woodshed" to teach him a "lesson"? In the story, the father does not seem offended, desirous to punish the son as he comes back. The father runs and buries the foul-smelling lad with and embrace of his whiskers, his tears and his kisses.

In the context of the parable, Jesus is talking to the Pharisees who were objecting to Jesus eating with Sinners.

Here is what the Pharisees would say about the younger son as they heard the story:

- a. He has insulted the old man even asking for to sell part of the family orchard. In a Jewish village, to sell the land to a gentile would "make" you a gentile. In the story, there is not an explicit mention of the Palestinian ceremony of GASSASAH. They would place parched corn nuts in a jar. This would be broken in public... to say "these children are cut off from their inheritance of the land..." In America, "You are out of the Will of the parent."
- b. Second, he is living with unclean animals.
- c. He is not practicing his religious ceremonies.
- d. He has sold his property, thus he will be unable to take care of his father in his old age. So Jesus is painting a picture of the young son: unbelievable arrogant, disrespectful, insulting, unpleasant, immoral wasteful foolish and irreligious young man.

So, this an example of REAL SIN.

Now are any of you this sinful? Not here. We need to have a picture of the younger son... so we will know understand the demonstration of costly love of the father.

III The Encounter of the Younger Son and the Father

The younger son has the courage to face the village. He has thought out his script what he will say to the dear ole dad. But what about the folks in the village who will recognize me? They will be shouting obscenities, even call me every name in the book. The streets are narrow able to see me and maybe pull out the GASSASAH. They will remind me how I was cut off from the village and the family.

Let's move the camera to the Waiting Father. The Father is aware how the village may treat him with insults and ridicule. He must run to him before the village folks recognize him. Middle Eastern culture dictates that elderly men must never be seen running. The display of legs and ankles is humiliation. Elderly men were not to let others see their legs. Just as in middle Eastern culture one is not to see the bottom of their shoes. Get the setting: The father is ready to shelter him from the ridicule of the folks in the village. Here is the Father hugging, kissing the son, an elderly man allowing others to see his ankles and legs. Here is a photograph of A Loving Almighty God we know in Jesus Christ. A COSTLY DEMONSTRATION OF UNEXPETED LOVE. This is what God does for us when we confess our sins before him.

But what is the Ring.... The robe.... Sandals

All are great symbols known to all who hears this story in the first century. The Ring...is a signet ring gives the son the authority to represent the Father.... As a King's ring, of a Bishop's Ring.

The Robe..... Something worn by the father a great feasts and grand celebrations. The people are to honor him as they would honor the father of the family. To wear this robe would be a symbol that reconciliation is completed with the larger community.

The Sandals..... being shoeless was the sign of a slave. To have shoes was a sign that the slave was free to move where he pleases.

IV The Second Son's encounter

Again, we see the father going out to the elder son asking him to come in...He is upset with the younger brother's wasteful behavior. His coming in may mean he endorses the brother's wild behavior. Culture dictates that the older brother is to be the reconciler, the rescuer, of any younger sibling. But the father went out to plead with the older son. Here is another COSTLY DEMONSTRATION OF UNEXPECTED LOVE. This parable is the Gospel within the Gospel. It needs to be etched into our brains.... Here is a paraphrase of the parable presented in the BoCP.

V. Sacrament of Penance or Reconciliation of a Penitent

I want to expose you to this liturgy, just so we all may be reminded of the grace in our relationship with the Lord Jesus. Open the Prayer Book to page 447. Read top two paragraphs on page 446. I am sure there are over 1000 jokes related to confession and questions why is a priest involved.... This sacrament is a demonstration of God's unexpected love of us as we confess our sin.

VI Blessed are those who mourn,
who develop an attitude to become aware of their errors.

They will be comforted. Matthew 5:4

Some researchers can verify that as a person reveals their mistakes and wrongs in a safe environment, then mental comfort is experienced. In the 12 Steps in Recovery, there is a fourth step that has to do with a MORAL INVENTORY. When we make a self-examination of ourselves to confess to God or as James states, "confess your sins one to another" we become aware of our wrongs and transgressions. There is one group of folks within the state of Alabama who have a very hard time admitting their errors. Someone may think that is the some 20 politicians in Jefferson County who are serving time in state and federal prisons. Where is this niche in the citizens of AL? They are the folks in our county, state and federal prisons. The criminal mind does not have the ability to process the awareness of error and mistakes. Some of the most famous persons in the world with this inability to see their own error are Hitler, Idi Amin, Sadam Hussein, Fidel Castro, and others.

Certainly one focus of Lent is to become more aware of any wrongs or hurts we have caused others. We have sins of omission and commission. As I look over the past week or weeks, we ask ourselves what have we neglected, who have we hurt consciously or unconsciously? The *Litany of Penitence* for Ash Wednesday page 268 is a helpful guide to examine ourselves. Do you have difficulty saying you are sorry? EG. Sports in high school and college... Coach always say: "Practice on our mistakes and then we will be perfect this can be seen in the past game films.... I recall a coach saying, look at Bush is he on a picnic?

What is the first steps? Embrace the Grace of God... He is coming toward us. He wants to place the best robe on us.. elevate us to be a Christian Walking in forgiveness. He wants to place a ring on our finger... to be his ambassador to all the persons in your social network. He wants you to wear the shoes of freedom who no longer walk with guilt that enslaves you.

Some gestures and resources: List, Paraphrase of 10 commandments on page 847-848, Ash Wednesday Litany, 267-268. Ask your friends or spouse for feedback, where have I missed the mark.

Prayer: Lord may we experience you embracing and kissing us with your grace, so we are aware of our wrongs and sins, and then make a heart felt confession.