

“Heart of a Father” – Luke 15:1-3

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(Monologue) My name is Josiah and I am a father. Those of you here today who are parents know the joys and challenges of being a parent. Those of you who are parents and grandparents know my heart – you love your kids and would do almost anything for them, no matter what.

So, today I want to tell you about my two sons. My oldest son has always been good, hard-working and faithful. Whatever I asked of him he did for me. He was indispensable around the farm. We had a large farm complete with hundreds of hired hands and thousands of sheep and cattle. Life at our place was a hard one, but a good one. I expected a lot but my oldest son was always there, and I was there for him, loving him and providing him with all he needed.

But it was a different story with my younger son...he was restless and a storm was brewing deep inside of him. One day I knew something was different. He walked right up to me on the porch. I stayed seated waiting for him to speak. He just looked at me for a long time. I don't know if he was trying to work up the courage to say what he was going to say, or if he had second thoughts, but his silence lasted only a minute. When he did speak his words cut me to the core. They were words he had been thinking for a long time, and words he had obviously rehearsed.

“Father,” he said, “I am tired of living in this place. It is stifling me, holding me in. I can't live here in this cage any more. I need to be free, to find somewhere that I can breathe. I guess I am trying to say, I am leaving.”

“So where are you going to go?” I asked him. I didn't know what else to say. “I'm heading to the city. I have some friends there,” he said. “And what will you do there?”

“I don't know - hang out, party, be alive, not worry about the farm or getting up before dawn, just not worry about anything.”

“Do you really think that will make you free?” I asked. “A life spent without responsibility isn't freedom. It is denial. You don't have to be a farmer, but if you go off and chase after this foolishness you will never be free either. You will be a slave to your own vices. You will be a slave to money. Have you even thought about how you will support yourself?”

And then he said words that cut me to the core. Then he in essence said that he wanted me dead. Of course he didn't come right out and say it that way, but I knew what he

meant. What he said was, "I am owed an inheritance. Give me that now so I can leave this place. I have worked here all of my life now give me what I am due."

I didn't know what to say. How could I have messed up so completely? How could I have failed to teach him? Did he really think that the life he was chasing was freedom? If he did then I had failed. I couldn't think of any other way to show him. I couldn't think of any other way to tell him, to help him understand. So I did what I would never have imagined. I gave him his share of the inheritance.

When he took the money the next morning, he didn't even look me in the eyes. I think what hurt me the most wasn't that he was leaving, it was that he didn't even understand the sacrifice it was for me to let him go. Sure it hurt to give up the land, but it hurt even more to see him walk out that door wishing I was dead. "You can always come home" I told him as he walked down the road.

Life continued after that. My older son and I continued to work the farm and the fields. We still laughed some, but not as much. We would hear pieces of stories from people passing through—stories of younger son and his new lifestyle. It seems he had a lot of friends. Every story involved him in a bar somewhere buying everyone drinks. It seemed like everyone loved him.

Part of me wondered if he had really found the freedom he was searching for. Part of me wondered if he had grown up enough to know that freedom couldn't be bought with money. Part of me wondered if he was dead. I just didn't know where he was, and even after 5 years it was still tearing me up inside.

Then one day I saw a figure coming up the road. I stood to look, and had almost convinced myself it was someone else. He was filthy, tattered, with eyes that were sullen, almost defeated. But, when I saw the way he walked, I knew that it was my son.

I ran to him with open arms and hugged him like I never had before. My son was home; the wanderer had returned. Then, came his confession: "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you." Then, once again, he said words that cut me to the core, "I am no longer worthy to be called your son." Instead of anger and resentment for what he had done, I showed him grace. "I am just glad you are home. I love you. Of course you are still my son."

"Hey everyone come quickly; my son is home. Go and grab him some clothes, fire up the grill, call all the neighbors - tonight we are having a party. My son has finally come home! He was lost, but now has found his freedom."

Enter my oldest son. He couldn't understand... He was angry, jealous, and refused to join in the party. Once again, I had to act with grace. "Son, you are always with me, and all that

I have is yours. But, tonight we celebrate, your brother was dead, and is now alive; he was lost, and is found.”

What could I do, they were my sons. Condemn them because of their sin? Cut them off because they both failed me in their own way? I chose to deal with them with grace and in mercy. That’s how much I love them.

(Take off head dress)

Where are you in this story tonight/today? We all relate in some way to this parable of Jesus – either as the younger son, the older sibling, or as the Father. Or in other words, at some time in our life, we have been a runner, a pointer, or a forgiver. Perhaps we’ve been all three.

A runner – wanting to go our own way, being our own boss, wanting complete independence. But, wanting more gives us less – temporary happiness and fleeting contentment.

A pointer – we have stood in judgment over others. We have been like the Pharisees as we look at others, and lift up ourselves. We still try to earn God’s favor by what we do.

A forgiver – Not judging, but dealing with others with grace and mercy. Who in your life needs mercy. We thank and praise our good Father in heaven for his grace and mercy with us...

How might we learn the lesson of repentance and forgiveness from God, our Father? How can we offer forgiveness to others? Is there someone in your life that you have given up on? Let us watch and wait for others, just as God has for us. In the name of Jesus. Amen.