**“Reconciled”**

Isaiah 12:1-6

2 Corinthians 5:16-21

Luke 15:1-3, 11-32

 Lent, March 26/27, 2022

“Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. It was fitting to celebrate and be glad, for this **your brother** was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found.”

Grace to you and peace from God, our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

**Bridge**

Where last week we heard the glorious news of people (us / “fig trees”) planted by God into the “vineyard” of His kingdom, this week we hear of **family** (a loving **father**) with **sons** who **He** **cares about no matter what**. I continue to remember my father telling me (us / my family, mom and my brother with me) to get our heads down when on a picnic … hearing gunfire. **He stood up (I remember) yelling at where the gunfire sound came from, protective and would have taken bullets for me** **/ for us I know**. My fondest night-time dream is of him running through muck and mire (through anything) to whisk me away from danger. I was **secure** in his self-sacrificing protection and love, unconditional because of **who I was to him**. He would do anything for me because I was **his son**.

**Text**

In today’s parable, we no longer have trees and vineyards / plants and soil of placement to describe all of this, but **people** and **decisions**, and **feelings**, and a **constant knowledge and awareness that makes decisions possible and available … makes safe and secure and (sometimes) a complacency in that and rebellion, but rebellion from something wonderful to KNOW HOW TO return to it if lost**. We have a **scenario of being inside the nature of the Gospel, which is not something everyone in this world has**. And we have that to **enjoy** before ever contemplating beyond it to the literal analogy of the **even-while-on-earth** dynamic that it explains. “A man **had two sons**”.

Remember that (from last week) the “**Man**” / “**A Man**” in the parables Jesus told is most always the Heavenly Father. “Sons” (two of them, both His) are described. Jesus isn’t one of the two, but the two are, also, every bit as much in the **brotherhood with Jesus as they are with each other**. That’s the **family dynamic of this divine family**. He’s the **Third of the Brothers telling the family story** … and as **only** **He can** tell **this family story**.

Last week, I shared my favorite definition of a parable (and I’m going to stick with that): a “**story in the Bible sounding like a pleasant yarn and yet keeping up its sleeve something that pops us and just levels us flat**”. That first “**pop**” for today is the explanation of **“family” in the household of the Heavenly Father**. Outside it is **not “family”**, so (without trying to judge, but certainly wanting to be aware of the mission field) pharaohs weren’t (most likely) family members in God’s kingdom, Romans weren’t overall early on, the far east probably wasn’t represented in this way back then, the Huns and their predecessors probably weren’t family members at Jesus time … they didn’t know of it yet. “**My people by covenant, they were**”, children under the umbrella of the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob / Israel, **they were** **divine family** **by the promise of covenant** (children / brothers and sisters under God’s Fathership). And lest we think it **remained that narrow**, the Holy Spirit was given **to, also, Gentiles by adoption** (baptized, or grafted in to that covenant promise), and, so, **we baptized and believing Gentiles** are “family” members (the brothers) to whom Jesus spoke this descriptive parable to and about.

It was told to family **members** (to **tax collectors in the family and sinners-in-general in the family and the Pharisees of the family and the scribes of it, all brothers and sisters** complaining (these latter ones did) about the suggestion of **brotherhood** with “**such as those others**”. Jesus “**received sinners” (“brothers like THEM”)**, and that was the rub, “eating with **THEM**”. And such a **shared family meal and brotherly fellowship** seemed **unsavory** **to the arrogant** …

… which category **you and I** might fall into in family membership or, maybe, also as “black sheep”. **Either way**, the **brotherhood of both to each other** because we’ve all been promised this divine family membership by God’s will and covenant should (with our Dad being God) be what’s **first** **popping us and leveling us flat**. **Dad is God** … and by His grace we baptized believers are one of the two of God’s “**My Three Sons**” (described by the Third, Himself, always implied into the dynamic). **We get addressed by Jesus because it’s always designed to be a family discussion**. And if we want to be **missional as this family**, then it’s to look to **adopt others** **who (for now) aren’t given to enjoy that same family benefit themselves**. It is **tragic** to be **unspoken-of in this family manner /** Holy Scripture silent about one still breathing so available for it. To **not be addressed by Jesus in His parable; that’s the** **tragedy of all possible tragedies**.

A **second** **“popping** **and leveling us flat” is this:** **wanting to escape Dad … asking Him for a release from His care**? I read an article this week about how **even we** ask Him for this **release** multiple times (and, maybe even, weekly), but it’s **this thought process (as the article described it): at first, and initially**, it’s a “**refreshing gladness to know ourselves in this divine family**”. **Then**, there’s the **remembrance of “personal-freedom-to-mess-that-up, which we can do … thinking we’d have-FUN-messing-it-all-up**”. **Then** “there’s a **calm that gets relaxed into, enjoying being taken care of and liking that lots**”. **Then**, “**tempting thoughts / FEELINGS get to be more important to a family member than the family itself, and curiosity for something ‘new’ gives way to, then, ‘wanting to find out how it might be’ and ‘what might it hurt to try it all**”. **Freedom** is a **nagging force**. **“Father, GIVE ME MINE TO RUN AWAY WITH … even if all of it was gifted by you, so not really mine anyway”. And the Father GRANTS THAT FREEDOM, and did here by divided His property between them, and not many days later, that son gathered all he had and took a journey into a far country, there squandering what the Father had given him in reckless living”**. He **became** “**dead**” the Father called him … not “on vacation” or some “break to, just, double back to, maybe”, but “**DEAD**”, and **that designation** ought to **undercut us**, **laying us out flat** … it’s a **disastrous consequence of the choice**.

## Application

You know the backside of this story, though. But do you really **know it from this death to life thing?** It’s **ignored far too often by (maybe even) us** because there’s sometimes hope that **that young kid** “gets what he deserves for his rebellion”. When **we’re the other brother (or think we are)**, pride or just forgetfulness or being too embarrassed to face family who **we’d disowned so, maybe, they us as well** is paralyzing. **Returning with one’s** “**tail between their legs**” (even if it’s just back to the house and Father from the fields of our anger) isn’t easily done … and the very **phrase (“tail between legs”) was made up to discourage it** …

… but the young son “**CAME TO HIMSELF!”** If there’s a phrase in this parable that’s an **“upper-cut” of immense wisdom all by itself / so powerful even that it can move legs (as the young brother did) and “arise and return to his father”**, there’s the phrase … and it’s the **wisdom of humbled repentance and knowledge of WHERE DAD IS**. …..

I won’t spend much time on the blessed **backend of this family story**, but possibly you’ve not heard it **THIS WAY (so I’ll close this way): with even the hint of reconciliation being the desire of a son who “COMES TO HIMSELF” / REPENTS KNOWING HE CAN’T SAVE HIMSELF, like Adam’s leaving of the Father’s immediate household, that Father “CAME RUNNING” (and that RUN is the history described in the entire Old Testament that prepared for the New)**.

And the “compassion and running and embracing and kissing” **isn’t surprising knowing the family dynamic**. **Parents know** if one of their young children goes missing for too long, and I remember my brother and I getting lost among the women’s clothing racks and mannequins while mom and my grandma shopped. And after some, maybe, they’d panic (at least until they started knowing more where to look) they’d find us and hug on us and kiss us, and **did that before ever lecturing us on wandering off**. I’ll tell you, we were usually under a mannequin’s dress hiding from each other or mom and grandma, and I remember my brother’s legs and his “Red Ball Keds” adding two more to the legs and feet of a mannequin. My dream’s **exactly that hugging-on-from-dad holding me protectively from trouble**.

The Messianic run-up was all about **THAT** in “RUNNING” to meet and **hug-on** the lost, the wandered-off, and the **dead**. The young son was **“dead” and then brought to “life”** **by His Father’s compassion and gracious embrace**. And the older son was “**always with** **Him / Dad**”, so **never lacking** **that wonderful** **location**.

Watch (or more importantly **feel and enjoy** in a couple weeks) as we remember the holiest of weeks. **THAT** is the **culmination of the Heavenly Father’s running to us to reconcile us by sacrificing our most glorious brother in Jesus upon a cross**. This He did to **reinstate us and put upon us (humbled by our sin) into “the best robe and family ring and shoes on our feet, to eat of the feast” that is, indeed, thrown for us every time we return.** In +Jesus’ name. Amen.