

Father's Day and the Prodigal Son

written for the Door County Advocate—June 17, 2006

On Father's Day weekend, I think about my dad in Sister Bay and my Father in Heaven. And I think about some of what Jesus taught about heaven and his Father there. One of Jesus' favorite teaching techniques was to use a parable, to tell a story from everyday life that made a powerful point. One of the stories Jesus told is commonly referred to as the Parable of the Prodigal Son. But I think it could more appropriately be called the Parable of the Forgiving Father. You find it in the Bible's New Testament in the Gospel of Luke in chapter 15. It is printed here for your convenience. As you read it, you might recognize yourself, or someone you know. Is this story about a lost son who wasted his money and his life? Is it about a lost brother who loved legalism and rules more than grace? Is it about a forgiving Father full of mercy and kindness? What do you think?

Jesus said, "There was a man who had two sons. And the younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of property that is coming to me.' And he divided his property between them. Not many days later, the younger son gathered all he had and took a journey into a far country, and there he squandered his property in reckless living. And when he had spent everything, a severe famine arose in 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 into his fields to feed pigs. And he was longing to be fed with the pods that the pigs ate, and no one gave him anything.

"But when he came to himself, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have more than enough bread, but I perish here with hunger! I will arise 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 as one of your hired servants."'

And he arose and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. And 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 servants, 'Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet. And bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate. For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.' And they began to celebrate.

"Now his older son was in the field, and as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing. And he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant. And he said to him, 'Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fattened calf, because he has received him back safe and sound.' But he was angry and refused to go in. His father came out and entreated him, but he answered his father, 'Look, these many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command, yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him!' And he said to him, '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.' "

Happy Father's Day.

Cory Dahl is pastor of First Baptist Church of Sturgeon Bay. His e-mail is cdahl@sturgeon-bay.com
Bible verses are from the Holy Bible, English Standard Version (ESV).