



Kirknewton and East Calder Parish Church of Scotland

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Readings Luke 15.1-3, 11-32

Sermon: 14 March 2010

Text Verse for the sermon verse 20

“But while the lost was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.”¹

Sermon

As you all know I am trying to go to the gym as regularly as possible. I must say that according to Nanda I only go because I can watch “telly” while exercising. And yes I will not deny it. I can’t always find time to watch television at home and the hour in the gym is just absolutely fantastic. I am amazed by what is going on not only in the world but especially in Britain. For a week now I have been watching “Fake Britain” and I cannot believe that gangsters are faking almost everything, from cars to fake identities for imposters!

As I was reading this text it dawned on me. If there is ONE thing you cannot fake it is love, real love. Why? - Because real love comes from God. It is his gift to us. It is a gift that is always accompanied by deeds, responsibility, sacrifice, peace, happiness, and joy.

And I guess this is exactly what Jesus is trying to tell his listeners in the first century and us! His love for us was not only words or promises.

In our reading Jesus responds to the reaction of the Pharisees that He is **including** all the people at the margins of their society namely the tax collectors and the sinners in his inner circle. The tax collectors were despised by their fellow countrymen as people who collected taxes for the government at a profit. They were seen as collaborators with the occupying pagan power. The Pharisees and legal teachers did not consider it proper to eat with those excluded from the religious community - intimate table fellowship implied

¹ *The Holy Bible : New International Version*. Grand Rapids : Zondervan, 1996, c1984, S. Lk 15:20

acceptance. The Pharisees had no political power in Jesus' day but were highly respected and thus influential among the larger population. They emphasized their own version of purity rules and looked forward to the resurrection of the dead.

Jesus is portraying to them the love of God in a picturesque way by telling them a parable.

So what did really happen in the parable? First it was quite a shocking thing to do in those days namely to claim your inheritance from your Father while he was still alive. When the younger son took his inheritance he was actually acknowledging that his father was dead – which is a very disgraceful and unloving way of treating your Father. In those days the eldest son always received a double portion of which in this case, he would have received two-thirds of the inheritance and the younger brother one-third. It would have been just as shocking for the first listeners to hear the reaction of the father. To them he was acting in a very disgraceful way, namely to give this immoral son his way! The people in those days would not identify themselves with the father.

Then of course the young laddie can't work with money and wasted it all. Some would now immediately say; it was expected. And then he became marginalized to the extent that he had to eat only what the pigs ate. Pigs were regarded as unclean. So this son was really cut off from society and other people. He was a loner with no one to help him because if they did, they would become unclean too and be isolated by their society!

So he decides to go back to his father but not as his son. He accepted the fact that he will go back as his father's servant. But the love of the father overshadows everything. He was so filled with love that he did a much undignified thing in those days namely to run to his son. He threw his arms around him and kissed him which meant that he acknowledged his son as his own. Then he commanded his servants to bring his son the best robe which would have been his own. They also had to put on his finger the family seal ring which was one of the most precious things in those days because it served as your identity document pretty much like our own driving licenses. It confirmed who you were and you would use it to seal all your most important documents. They also had to put sandals on his feet which were a sign that he was not to be regarded as a slave. The

gifts were signs of honour and authority. Then the father also commanded them to prepare a feast because his son was lost but is now found!

But then there is yet another turn in the parable. The oldest son hears of all that happened and is quite upset with his father. He reacts in a very disrespectful way against his father. He insults his father in two ways namely by refusing to enter his father's house and by not addressing his father properly. But the love of the father again overpowers all the insults. The father goes out to the oldest son and **begs** him to accept the fact that his other son which had been dead has now returned to them and is alive.

In the parable of the lost son, the elder brother is a transparent metaphor for the Pharisees, and the younger brother for the sinners with whom Jesus was eating. And the father of the lost Son is of course the metaphor of God the Father whose love cannot be restricted.

When I studied this parable I could not help but think of Paul's definition of love in 1 Corinthians 13 and I was not surprised to find all and more of the characteristics of real love in the actions of the father.

His love was patient, waiting for his beloved son to return to him just as God is waiting at times for us to respond in faith. He knew very well that his lost son could not survive on his own. I think it is the same with us. God the Father knew from his loving heart that we cannot survive without his love, salvation, presence and hope on this earth. He decided to run to us in the salvation, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Yes He embraces us every day through his Holy Spirit despite our sins, faults, and imperfections. When God looks at us, He does it through eyes of love like the father in the parable.

His love was so kind and generous to forgive all the transgressions of his sons just as God the father forgave us all our sins and transgressions!

His love was not spiteful. He did not tell his son I told you so.

He did not give his son several ultimatums to fulfill before moving back into his house. Sometimes our love can be so demanding and spiteful and the result - an increasing number of divorces, broken children and a crippled society.

His love did not boast or sing his own praises. No he had joy in the son's returning to home. He humbled himself before both his sons. His focus was on them!

His love was not so proud that it excluded his sons. No, despite the fact that they treated him in an unkind way, he still responded with love. He kissed his younger son and showered him with gifts of love. He went outside to his eldest son and begged him to understand although he was the patriarch who could punish him!

His love was not rude, self seeking or angered. He did not make a scene even when his oldest son reacted angrily; he stayed calm and pleaded with him.

His love did not keep record of all the wrong things his sons did to him.

His love protected his sons. He trusted them. Yes His love persevered even to the end.

His love was also sacrificial. Although his sons took away his dignity, he kept on loving them. If this is not a powerful message to portray God's love for us, I don't know of anything else that could.

If there is one lesson we can learn it is to accept the love of God with acts of love, thanksgiving and deeds of faith. Because this love never ever fails.

Sometimes we can experience that our children drift away. Sometimes they go off the rails and yes we sometime loose our cool when it comes to real life situations. But we have a responsibility as followers of Jesus to imitate His love. Our love must be:

- Patient
- Kind and generous
- Forgiving
- Protecting
- Trusting
- Persevering
- Sacrificial
- Not being spiteful
- Not being boastful

- Not being Proud
- Not being Rude, angry, selfish,

On this mother's day may we experience the real love of God in the way that mothers speak to their children, touch them and teach them about the Lord God.

Amen.