

March 7, 2021

The Third Sunday of Lent

Luke 15:1-32

Children's Message: In the last couple of weeks we have been talking about making decisions. The things we look for to make the right decisions and if we make mistakes how we can fix them. This morning I thought I would give you a situation and make you think. It is easier than I make it sound.

This is a situation I use to give the grade twelve ethics class to struggle with. You and your best friend go mountain climbing on a mountain both of you have never climbed. You have known your best friend since senior kindergarten and you have grown up together. You are climbing in the lead position and your friend is behind you. There is a rope tied around your waist and the other end is tied to your friend's waist. There is an unwritten rule among mountain climbers that if one climber falls and cannot be saved the other cuts the rope.

As fate would have it, you are more than half way up the rock face. Your friend slips and falls on some sharp rocks. Looking back you can see that their head is badly cut and they are dangling in mid-air. It is possible that your friend has broken their back. You are hanging on to a rock with only your fingers. What do you do? Do you cut the rope and let your friend fall? Do you hang on and hope that someone sees you and calls for help? All the time your arms are getting tired from

holding yourself and your friend. Or do you just give into exhaustion and fall to your death with your friend? What do you do? Ask me on Sunday and I'll tell you the answer if you have not figured it out already.

Adult's Message: We have been blessed to have been given minds and intellect. We use them all the time to assess and discern situations that arise in our lives. Some will be good and some not so much. There will be times that we will be deceived in our judgement. Sometimes things may look great, but in the end become smoldering disasters.

Ultimately it falls back upon us.

It has been said that in order to know virtue you must first know vice. Trust me this is not a license to go off and do anything you want. What it really means is that we should study vice and sin. It is mostly sin for our purposes this morning. One studies and learns about sin from the lives of the saints. The lives of the saints is a very helpful resource in understanding the nature and patterns of sin. The saints wrote about their struggles with sin and vice. Many documents their successes and failures so that future generations may learn from them. We are not reinventing the wheel. There is so much we can learn from the resources they left us.

They have said that sin is unnatural to our nature. We were created perfectly in the image of God. Sin was not part of our creation. Unfortunately it crept into the garden and had access to us. Sin will make you behave in strange and unnatural ways that are not part of your character. Sin starts in the mind and imagination and then attempts to deceive. It begins as a thought. Sin is carried out to its fullness when it moves from a thought into an action. Sin is never ugly,

gross or unattractive. If it was we could avoid it very easily. Remember the saying, that if it is too good to be true, it usually is.

Our Lord tells an unbelievable story of a prodigal son. To His listeners this goes far beyond the cultural norms of the day. It sounds like fantasy. Yet Jesus tells it to illustrate the point that there is more rejoicing in Heaven over one repentant sinner than a hundred that do not need to repent.

In the story the younger son does something very unnatural and culturally inappropriate. He asks for his inheritance. His greed is showing. He is cutting out a huge amount of monies that would go to the older brother upon their father's death. He is being disrespectful to his father just by asking. He is acting very unnatural by asking for his inheritance and for wanting to leave his family. In Semetic culture this almost never happens. The father could have slapped him in the head and said get a clue and it would have been acceptable.

Sin makes a person forget the past and to only focus on the present. The son most likely nagged his father for his portion. The son probably thought the future would be rosy with his money and friends. If only he could get out of home that was so terrible. When he got his money he probably thought he has everything he could want. He has freedom, money and friends. What could possibly go wrong? Sin started in his mind with the idea that life would be better away from home. That in the past it was a limiting prison. Once he got his money then his future would be set.

I have always found sin fascinating. Mostly in how it makes people act so abnormal and unnatural. So that they would behave so uncharacteristically. Sin also loves to pull others into the situation. In

order to normalize the unnatural behaviour. The son's friends were pulled into the situation to do just that.

We know what happens to the son. He runs out of money and has to work for a pig farmer. Things went from good to bad to worse. He realized that the pigs had it better than himself. Then he realized that out here is the prison and that the home he left was where the real freedom was. Then he realized that he needed to return to his father. Even as a servant in his father's house would be better than working with pigs and being hungry all day.

This has been called the sweet moment in Luke's gospel and it reflects the deeper components of repentance. Luke 15:17, "But when he came to himself." The sweet moment is when sinning is leaving you and repentance is returning you to yourself. The sweetness of returning to yourself from a bad situation. To change your mind and circumstances and return to God.

Repentance has been studied by many. They claim it has six elements. The order can be switched up depending on the situation. 1. Regret what you have done. 2. Admit. 3. Correct the situation. Judas Iscariot regretted betraying Jesus, he admitted his actions, but could not correct the things he set into motion. 4. Hope in God. Judas lost hope and that was why he ended his life. 5. Confess: Talk with God from your heart about what has happened. Ask for His help and guidance. Sometimes it helps to talk it out with family and friends. 6. Flee from the pattern of sin that you fell into. Learn from your mistakes and do not repeat them.

God's joy over a repentant sinner is far greater than the joy the father had for the sons return. God's rejoicing turns cultural norms upside

down. That is how important a repentant person is when they return to God and their intended nature. God rejoices greatly. Nothing else seems to matter. Not fattened calfs or cultural norms.

There is a danger in hearing these stories so many times. We can become desensitized to the root of their message. We need to remember that we can always come back to God. Regardless of what we have done. We must not let shame blind our hope. Hope tells us that we are always accepted when we return to God. This is a beautiful thing when we experience that sweet moment and come to ourselves. We return to our original nature and God. It is very helpful to recognize the patterns of sin and to avoid them. Some have called this spiritual warfare. I have come to call it religious psychology. Most of us do not think of the deeper elements of repentance but they are there. If you spent too much time with it one could easily go around the bend. God bless and take care, Pastor D