

## THE CELEBRATION

TODAY'S GOSPEL READING WAS THE FAMILIAR STORY OF THE PRODIGAL SON. HOWEVER, ONLY THE FINAL SEVEN VERSES WERE READ, HIGHLIGHTING THE OLDER SON AND HIS REACTIONS TO HIS FATHER'S ACTIONS UPON THE RETURN OF HIS SON, THE PRODIGAL. .

WE HAVE HEARD THIS STORY TOLD BY JESUS NUMEROUS TIMES OVER THE YEARS, **BUT DO YOU KNOW THE MEANING OF "PRODIGAL"?** WHEN WE ARE AWARE OF THE MEANING OF WORD, THE STORY BECOMES SOMETHING WE CAN RELATE TO. PRODIGAL MEANS "wasteful, especially with money". WE CAN SEE HOW THIS WORD CERTAINLY APPLIED TO THE SON THAT LEFT WITH HIS INHERITANCE. AGAIN, **I WANT TO FOCUS ON THE OLDER SON WHO STAYED HOME.**

PREVIOUSLY IN THIS CHAPTER 15 OF LUKE ARE THE STORIES OF THE LOST SHEEP AND THE LOST COINS. THIS CHAPTER CLOSES WITH THE LOST SON, THE PRODIGAL. ***IN EACH STORY THE LOST WAS FOUND AND THERE WAS CELEBRATION.*** WHEN THE LOST SHEEP WAS FOUND THE SHEPHERD CALLED TOGETHER HIS FRIENDS AND NEIGHBORS TO REJOICE WITH HIM. THE SAME RESULT WITH THE WOMAN WHO HAD LOST HER COIN, FOUND IT, REJOICED WITH HER FRIENDS AND NEIGHBORS. NOW WE THINK WHY WAS SHE LOOKING AROUND FOR ONE COIN. COMMENTARIES WILL TELL US THAT THE TEN SILVER COINS WOULD HAVE AMOUNTED TO TEN DAY'S WAGES, SO ESSENTIALLY SHE HAD LOST A DAY'S WAGES!

WE READ OF THREE TYPES OF **LOSS**. **WE CAN BE LOST** LIKE THE SHEEP, STRAYING EATING GRASS NIBBLE BY NIBBLE OR **FOR US IT IS STEP BY STEP AND FIND OURSELVES FAR FROM THE CHURCH**. THEN THERE IS THE LOST COIN. **LOST THROUGH CARELESSNESS LIKE CHOOSING THE WRONG FRIENDS, HANGING OUT IN THE WRONG PLACES OR BAD CHOICES**. IT IS BEING LOST BY BECAUSE OF **OUR INDIFFERENCE OR NEGLIGENCE**. THE THIRD TYPE IS **ACTUALLY CHOOSING TO BE LOST-- OUTWARDLY REBELLING AGAINST GOD, PARENTS OR SOCIETY AS A WHOLE**. THAT IS LIKE OUR PRODIGAL SON IN THE STORY.

REMEMBER TOO, THAT THESE STORES ARE BEING TOLD AMONG THE GRUMBLING OF THE PHARISEES. THEY WERE GRUMBLING BECAUSE OF WHO JESUS WAS EATING AND ASSOCIATING WITH. **JESUS IN THE THREE STORIES IS SHOWING THE JOY AND FESTIVE NATURE OF GOD CELEBRATING ONE WHO COMES HOME TO HIM**. JESUS WAS REALLY POINTING OUT TO THE RELIGIOUS OF THE DAY THAT RELIGION WAS NOT ABOUT RULES AND REGULATIONS, BUT RELATIONSHIPS AND RESTORING ONES THAT HAS BEEN DAMAGED.

BACK TO THE OLDER SON IN THE **PRODIGAL SON** STORY. HE ACTUALLY IS THE **FOURTH TYPE OF LOST**, BUT SADLY HE DOESN'T KNOW IT. **THIS IS THE HARDEST ONE TO DEAL WITH**. **SUCH A PERSON DOES NOT REALIZE WHAT THEY ARE MISSING IN LIFE**, THE OLDER SON WAS MISSING HIS FATHER'S **GREAT LOVE AND GENEROUS NATURE**.

FROM THIS RATHER SHORT DIALOGUE BETWEEN THE FATHER AND OLDEST SON IT IS OBVIOUS THAT THE BIGGEST PART OF HIS PROBLEM IN THIS SITUATION IS **HIS OWN STUBBORNNESS**. *I HAVE BEEN TOLD I AM STUBBORN, BECAUSE MY HERITAGE IS BOHEMIAN AND I LABEL IT AS STICKING TO IT - A POSITIVE SPIN ON IT.* HOWEVER, ALL KIDDING ASIDE WILLFUL STUBBORNNESS IS AN OBSTRUCTION, A HURDLE ON THE ROAD OF OUR SPIRITUAL JOURNEY. THE JOURNEY I HOPE WE ARE ALL TAKING THIS LENTEN SEASON.

THERE ARE **MANY EXAMPLES OF THIS STUBBORNNESS IN THE BIBLE** FROM THE PHARAOH NOT LETTING HIS PEOPLE GO. THE BIBLE TELLS US IN EXODUS THAT AFTER EACH PLAGUE OCCURRED THE PHARAOH "HARDEN HIS HEART". SIMPLY HE DUG IN HIS HEELS, WHICH RESULTED IN WALLS GOING UP AND BECOMING ISOLATED. FOR MANY OF US WHO SAW THE MOVIE "THE TEN COMMANDMENTS" WE CAN NOT FORGET THE SCENE WHERE THE LAST PLAGUE IS THE DEATH OF THE FIRST BORN NOT PASSED OVER BY THE LAMB'S BLOOD ON THE FRAME OF THE DOORS. YUL BRENNER HAS AN UNREAL CONVERSATION WITH HIS QUEEN OVER THE DEATH OF THEIR SON. THE QUEEN PROVOKES HIM WHILE HE IS PRAYING TO A GOD OF THE UNDERWORLD WITH THE FACT THAT MOSES' GOD IS STRONGER. OF COURSE THIS JUST PROVOKES HIS STUBBORNNESS FURTHER TO PURSUE THE JEWS AND KILL THEM ALL. STUBBORNNESS CAN LEAD US TO IRRATIONAL ACTS THAT CAN AFFECT OTHERS, HARMING THEM AND CAUSING PAIN.

**THE OLDEST SON IN TODAY'S STORY IS STUBBORN.** LOOK AT HIS REACTION TO HIS YOUNGER BROTHER'S RETURN – HE BECAME ANGRY AND REFUSED TO GO INTO THE CELEBRATION. SOON THE FATHER COMES OUT TO PLEAD WITH HIM TO COME IN AND BE A PART OF THE CELEBRATION, BUT STUBBORNNESS INSTEAD RELEASES A TIRADE OF WORDS AGAINST THE FATHER. **NOTICE HE IS NOT MAD AT THE BROTHER WHO IS RECEIVING ALL THIS ATTENTION UPON HIS RETURN, THE OLDEST SON IS GOING AFTER HIS FATHER!!** *THAT IS WHAT STUBBORNNESS CAN DO TO US, CLOUD OUR THINKING AND NOT SEE CLEARLY. WE BELIEVE IN OUR MINDS AND HEARTS THAT WE ARE RIGHT, AND EVERYBODY ELSE IS WRONG!*

TODAY, SADLY THIS IS THE WAY OUR COUNTRY HAS EVOLVED IN MANY AREAS OF OUR LIVES. ONE PERSON COMPLAINS, IS STUBBORN AND EVERYTHING CHANGES. **JOINING TOGETHER AND "MEETING IN THE MIDDLE" IS NOW CONSIDERED BEING A TRAITOR.** HOW DID WE ARRIVE AT THIS POINT, HOW DID WE GET HERE? ONE INGREDIENT I SEE IS WE HAVE LOST SIGHT OF BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES THAT SHOULD DETERMINE HOW WE LIVE DAY TO DAY!!

I RECENTLY DISCOVERED AN ARTICLE ONLINE FROM A WELL KNOWN CHRISTIAN PHILOSOPHER THAT LIVED IN SWITZERLAND – **FRANCIS SHAFFER**. HE HAD A RETREAT CENTER WHERE YOUNG PEOPLE COLLEGE AGE COULD COME AND EXCHANGE IDEAS. **HE WROTE A BOOK AND THERE WAS A FILM SERIES CALLED "WHAT EVER HAPPENED TO THE HUMAN RACE?"**. FOR ME EVERY YOUNG PERSON AND ANY ADULT WHO HAS NOT SEEN IT SHOULD!!! THIS BOOK AND MOVIE WAS DONE IN THE 80'S WITH SOME **"FORECASTS"** THAT IF THINGS CONTINUED ON THEIR CURRENT TRENDS IT WOULD

**RESULT, AND THIRTY OR MORE YEARS LATER MUCH OF IT HAS COME TO PASS.** THE STUBBORNNESS OF OUR CULTURE HAS PRODUCED WHAT WE SEE TODAY AND WE WRING OUR HANDS ABOUT. SHAFFER BROUGHT IT DOWN TO TWO WORLDVIEWS - THE FINAL OR ULTIMATE REALITY WAS GOD, OR THE FINAL OR ULTIMATE REALITY WAS THE PHYSICAL WORLD. IN OTHER WORDS, EITHER GOD AND MAN HAVE VALUE OR GOD IS NOT THERE AND THE WORLD (INCLUDING MAN) IS NOTHING MORE THAN A COSMIC MACHINE.

WITH THE DECLINE OF THE CHURCH AND THEREFORE ITS INFLUENCE ON CULTURE THE SECOND REALITY IS MORE IN PLAY TODAY. I WANT TO SAY SOMETHING THAT I BELIEVE IN MY HEART – The young people of our church and other churches are the future! What are we “passing“ on to them? We ought to stop complaining about them and give them our love and support!!! If these young people who have faith aren't encouraged and nurtured by us, then who will the culture??? Our culture is retreating faster from god then to god? What legacy, what's “in” our dash, anything that will make a lasting difference? And it is never too late to start making a difference!!

**ONE THING THAT WE CANNOT LET GET IN THE WAY IS OUR STUBBORNNESS THAT OUR WAY IS THE ONLY WAY.** GOING BACK TO THE OLDEST SON IN THE READING. HIS STUBBORNNESS MADE HIM SELFISH AND UNGRATEFUL. HIS FOCUS WAS NOT ON ALL HE HAD RECEIVED, BUT WHAT HE DIDN'T HAVE. THIS TYPE OF CULTURE THRIVES ON BEING A VICTIM AND THAT I DESERVE WHAT SOMEONE ELSE HAS!!! WE ARE CONSTANTLY LOOKING AT OTHERS AND WANT WHAT THEY HAVE. SEEMS I REMEMBER A COMMANDMENT ABOUT DESIRING WHAT SOMEONE ELSE HAS?

**IN THE JEWISH CULTURE THE OLDEST SON RECEIVED A DOUBLE INHERITANCE AND THE FATHER'S BLESSING,** BUT WHEN HE WAS STUBBORN HE VIEWED THINGS IN THE HERE AND NOW. **HE WAS SHORTSIGHTED!** WHEN THAT CALF, THE BEST OF THE BEST, IS KILLED AND USED FOR THE CELEBRATION THE SON CAN ONLY LOOK AT WHAT HE DOES NOT HAVE!!

I like the story about the 3rd graders who were asked to write down the 7 wonders of the world. After a while, the teacher began collecting the papers & looking at their answers, things like the Grand Canyon, the pyramids in Egypt, the Taj Mahal in India, wonders from all over the world. But one little girl was still busily writing. The teacher asked her, "Aren't you through? I just asked you to write down the 7 wonders of the world. What are you writing?" The little girl answered, "Well, I don't know if these are the right ones or not, but I have a whole lot more than 7." The teacher said, "Hand me your paper & let me see what you have written." Then he started reading the little girl's list of the 7 wonders of the world. "To be able to see, hear, think, breathe, touch, run, love, laugh." And the list went on.

**YOU SEE, OUR PROBLEM IS THAT WE THINK THAT THE GREAT THINGS OF LIFE ARE THE MATERIAL THINGS, THINGS LIKE FATTENED CALVES. WE MISS THE BLESSINGS THAT OUR FATHER IS GIVING TO US EVERY DAY. WHAT A LIST THE OLDER BROTHER COULD HAVE WRITTEN.** BUT NO, HE'S STANDING OUTSIDE, SELFISH & UNGRATEFUL, STILL REFUSING TO HEED HIS FATHER'S INVITATION. MANY PEOPLE ARE DOING EXACTLY THAT SAME THING TODAY WITH GOD THE FATHER.

**THE OLDEST SON WAS UNHAPPY AND UNFEELING TOO.** LOOK AT THE WAY HE ADDRESSES HIS FATHER NOT EVEN BY NAME. HE SAYS “I HAVE BEEN **SLAVING** FOR YOU”. SOMETIMES DO WE THINK “GOD, I HAVE BEEN SO GOOD, WHY IS MY WORK, MY SCHOOL, MY HOME OR MY FRIEND GOING SOUTH? DO WE THINK OF OUR FATHER IN HEAVEN LIKE THE OLDEST SON DID? **MAYBE WE SHOULD CHECK OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD AND SEE WHAT IS WRONG THERE. IF SOMETHING IS NOT RIGHT THERE,**

**IT WILL COME TO THE SURFACE IN OTHER AREAS. MANY TIMES WHAT IS GOING ON AT THE “SURFACE OF OUR LIVES” IS A MANIFESTATION OF ROOT PROBLEMS WITHIN US. TROUBLE IS, WE TRY TO SOLVE THE SURFACE PROBLEM AND WE DO NOT DEAL WITH THE ROOT PROBLEM, WHY? BECAUSE DEEP DOWN WE REALLY THINK WE ARE RIGHT AND BY GOSH WE ARE GOING TO DIG IN AND JUST BE PLAIN STUBBORN!**

**STUBBORNNESS WILL ALSO MANIFEST ITSELF IN US BEING UNFORGIVING AND UNLOVING.** THE OLDEST SON TELLS HIS FATHER “THIS SON OF YOURS” AND DID NOT CALL HIM “BROTHER”. THE PRODIGAL SON REALIZED HIS FATHER WAS GENEROUS WHILE HIS OLDER BROTHER WHO STAYED BY HIS FATHER'S SIDE LOOKED AT HIS FATHER AS STINGY. **THE OLDEST SON IN HIS STUBBORNNESS COULD NOT SEE THINGS AS THEY REALLY WERE.** *He had become unloving and unforgiving.*

*Paul warns us in romans. “because you are stubborn, you don't' repent..” Do we think we are perfect and there is no need to pray for mercy and forgiveness? DO WE DAILY THANK GOD, THE FATHER FOR HIS GENEROSITY OF LOVE, GRACE AND FORGIVENESS? OR BY THE END OF DAY, NEVER EVEN REALIZE WE HAVE NOT ONCE TURNED TO GOD IN GRATITUDE AND LOVE? STUBBORNNESS WILL DO THAT TO US, JUST LIKE IT DID TO THE OLDEST SON IN TODAY'S STORY.*

**STUBBORNNESS CAN LEAD TO US BEING SELF-RIGHTEOUS.** THE PHARISEES WERE A “FINE” EXAMPLE OF SUCH BEHAVIOR. THEY DISPLAYED ALL THE TRAITS I HAVE MENTIONED TODAY.

Joseph Stowell, president of Moody Bible Institute, has said that the American Church is “long on mad, and short on grace.” We're mad at politicians, we're mad at the media, we're mad at the President. We're also mad at those who live their lives differently than we do. Let's stop being so angry with people who sin. Lost people are going to sin because they're lost. Christians are going to sin because they're not perfect. This bears repeating let's refuse to be angry with people who sin differently than we do. The church of Jesus Christ is to be what Christ longs for it to be -- a gathering place for forgiven sinners. When we're self-righteous, when we think we're better than others, it's impossible to be gracious. We can't be grace-givers if we constantly believe that we are superior to others. We need to remember that there's a much bigger party going on than we think are we going to join it, or just stay outside and criticize? Maybe there's not much joy in your life because it's been a long time since you've come to the party of grace.

JOIN THE CELEBRATION BECAUSE GOD, THE FATHER, IS INVITING AND REJOICING OVER THOSE WHO COME TO HIM REALIZING HIS LOVE, HIS GRACE AND HIS FORGIVENESS. AMEN.