

Fourth Sunday in Lent, March 6, 2016

The gospel story for today is one that I believe is quite familiar to most of you, if not all of you. You will have heard this story told as early as your Sunday school days; I certainly remember hearing it then. The parable of the Prodigal Son has been one of my favourite parables but for very different reasons earlier on, than now. I was motivated by the inheritance I thought would come to me. But I soon realized that my parents had no wealth to distribute. Even if they did, being the first male child made no difference to my parents; besides, I have two older sisters, so either way, I stood to lose. As I matured, I found a much better reason for liking the parable. Now, as I listen to it being read, I get a deeper, more profound sense of the measure of God's inestimable love and grace that is unearned, yet freely given to all who seek.

The Parable of the Prodigal Son presents the main character as the forgiving father, whose character remains constant throughout the story as a clear picture of God. In telling the story, Jesus identifies Himself with God in His loving attitude to the lost. The younger son symbolizes the lost (the tax collectors and sinners of the day as noted elsewhere in the Gospels. (Luke 15:1); while the elder brother represents the self-righteous (the Pharisees and teachers of the law at that time. (Luke 15:2). The major theme of this parable seems not to be so much the conversion of the sinner, as in the previous two parables that of the "Lost sheep" and "The parable of the Lost Coin;" but rather the restoration of a believer into fellowship with the Father.

In the first two parables, the owner went out to look for what was lost; whereas in this story the father waits and watches eagerly for his son's return. We see a clear progression through the three parables from the relationship of one in a hundred (Luke 15:1-7) to one in ten, (Luke 15:8-10) to one in one (Luke 15:11-32); a demonstration of God's love for each individual and His personal attentiveness towards all humanity. We see in this story the graciousness of the father overshadowing the sinfulness of the son.

As we take a closer look at this parable from verse 12, the younger son asks his father for his share of his estate, which would have been about half of what his older brother would receive; in other words, 1/3 for him and