

The Return of The Prodigal Son

3-28-18

A Story of Homecoming

I. Slide1 Announce:

- A. Slide2 Good Friday: Communion & Cross-walk.
- B. Slide3 Easter Services: Communion

II. Slide4 Intro: A Story of Homecoming

- A. Let's refresh our thoughts of 1 of the greatest stories ever told - Lk.15:11-32.
- B. Slide5 **Henri Nouwen** (1932-1996) - a Dutch Catholic Priest. *A Professor, writer, Theologian.* Professor at Notre Dame, Yale, Harvard.
 1. Saw a poster on an office door, of Rembrandt's painting of the Prodigal Son that always caught his attention.
 2. After sitting in front of Rembrandt's painting, in St. Petersburg Russia, in the Hermitage Museum in 1986. He wrote a book in 1992 *The Return of the Prodigal Son: A Study of Homecoming*. He records his sensitive musings about the painting & records his own life journey.
- C. Slide6 **Rembrandt** - 1606-1669. The greatest painter of biblical themes.
 1. He was very much the odd man out (in his day) **painting so many biblical subjects** (which comprise about a third of his works).
 2. Vincent van Gogh wrote, *"Rembrandt goes so deep into the mysterious that he says things for which there are no words in any language. It is with justice that they call Rembrandt - magician - that's no easy occupation."*
 3. The impressionist Max Liebermann said, *"Whenever I see a Frans Hals, I feel like painting; whenever I see a Rembrandt, I feel like giving up."*
- D. Slide7 *The Return of the Prodigal Son* was Rembrandt final work in 1669. 1yr b4 his death
- E. Slide8 **Overview of Painting:** (8't x 6'w) in background, mom, the servant boy? Elder son standing off to the right side, arms folded. Wealthy financial advisor, sitting middle.
 1. I wrongly judged the painters of...not knowing style of dress in biblical times was different from their's. My ignorance, *they were trying to make the story relatable to their time period.*
- F. Slide9 Note the colors, the lighting.

G. **Baroque painters** (early 17th cent to late 18th cent) **worked deliberately to set themselves apart from the painters of the Renaissance.** [The word baroque was a Portuguese term for a pearl (*barocco*) with *an irregular shape*. A negative connotation until late 1800's].

1. **In their colors**, they used intense and warm colors, and particularly made use of the primary colors of painting at the time, red, blue and yellow, frequently putting all three in close proximity.
2. **In their lighting**, they avoided the even lighting of Renaissance painting **and used strong contrasts of light and darkness** on certain parts of the picture to direct attention to the central actions or figures.
 - a) "The whole represents a symbol of **homecoming**, of the darkness of human existence illuminated by tenderness of weary and sinful mankind taking refuge in the shelter of God's mercy."
3. **In their composition**, they avoided the tranquil scenes of Renaissance paintings, and chose the moments of the greatest movement and drama.
4. **Unlike** the tranquil faces of Renaissance paintings, **the faces in Baroque paintings clearly expressed their emotions.** [fathers left eye on son, right eye lost in thought]
5. They often used **asymmetry**, with **action occurring away from the center** of the picture. [left & right of seen]
6. **Another essential element of baroque painting was allegory; every painting told a story and had a message**, often encrypted in symbols and allegorical characters, which an educated viewer was expected to know and read.
 - a) **Slide10 Note**, just right of *the center faded figures head*, is a rough sketch which combines *debauchery with downfall*. The prodigal son with a sword by his side, playing the flute (good times), his fate foreshadowed w/pigs at his feet. - *Yet the fathers back is turned to all of this :)*

H. **Slide11 Note the prodigal son.** Humbled, kneeling. Hair, shaven. 1 shoe off the other worn-out. Head buried in fathers chest. Accepting forgiveness from his father. Warm glow on son's face from fathers red cloak.

I. **Slide12 Note the fathers hand.** His left hand dark strong firm spread out. The right, light delicate, expressing tenderness & love. **Fatherhood and the motherhood of God.** The

father literally enfolds/envelopes his son, giving both forgiveness & blessing to his former prodigal.

- J. **Slide13 Note the older son** off to the side hands clasped, numb, biting tongue. Rejecting, the younger accepting.
- K. The lostness of the younger & older son.
 1. Both needed healing & forgiveness. Both needed to come home. Both needed the embrace of a forgiving father.
 2. The hardest conversion is the son who stayed home.

III. **Slide14 DIRTY LITTLE SINNERS (11-20a)**

- A. Maybe better titled *The Parable of the Gracious Father*. That's the true focus.
- B. The Pharisees are still *trying to get it*.
 1. Jesus is answering the indictment of **eating with sinners** (2).
 2. "When I eat with sinners it's like going after lost sheep. It's like finding a costly lost coin. It's like experiencing a prodigal returning."
- C. (13) **Prodigal** – wasteful. No thought of responsibilities. **It feels free/freeing...for a time**
 1. **How many a college students have moved away to a distant land, away from mom & dad, away from accountability, away from watchful eyes, enjoying there new felt freedoms; that often landed them right on their faces.**
 - a) It is like sky diving, wind in your face, living fast,...with no shoot.
 2. They felt **restrained** by home, & **attracted** by the world.
 3. *We become restless when we can't find satisfaction in God.*
- D. (14) **Fortune goes & Famine comes**. Life within & circumstances without often agree.
- E. **Why do you think some prodigals don't come home?**
 1. **What will my friends say? What will my dad, mom, brothers, sisters say? What will my church friends say?**
 2. Jesus says, **Come home! From sin, from a broken relationship, from the sting of this world! Come Home!**
- F. **He came to himself** – like awaking from a dream, he came to grip with reality.
 1. He finally saw himself as he really was & remember his father's home

2. At this point no hope of restored **son-ship**, **but** hopes for a **servant position**.
3. It was not the **badness** of his life that brought him to his senses, **but** the goodness of his father. [Oh yah] Rom.2:4 *the goodness of God leads you to repentance?*

IV. Slide15 **THE PARDONING FATHER (20b-24)**

- A. **Releasing** (12) sometimes you have to let them go & let them find out the hard way.
 1. Let them learn for themselves how **good** Father's home is.
- B. **Saw him a long way off** – watching continually & recognizes quickly.
- C. **Compassion** – **When a son is lost, who suffers most?** (Fathers/mothers can answer that 1)
 1. **Oh the suffering heart of God.** (we'll never fully understand/comprehend)
- D. **Running** – an apparent sacrifice of dignity. **No hesitation. Quick reconciliation.**
- E. **The father rushed to welcome his son & wouldn't even let him finish his well rehearsed confession. How many times did he rehearse it?**
 1. "Um Lord"... "**Yes you are forgiven!**" [this helps me with the stories of the women caught in adultery & the thief on the cross]
- F. **Slow** are the steps of repentance, but **swift** are the feet of forgiveness.
 1. **God** can **run** where **we** can barely **limp**.
 2. *The Father may be out of breath, but never out of love.* Spurgeon
 3. **Could I forgive so quickly?** No hesitation, w/o rebuke, not waiting to see if they'll really stick around.
- G. **Kissing** – smothered him with kisses.
 1. **But wait...he's not clean.** (That's what the Pharisees were saying about this unwashed crowd. vs.2)
 2. **Shouldn't you wait and see** how he does?
 3. **Shouldn't he be put on probation & see** if he does well?
 4. **No way** – Let me get my arms around him. *Let me pillow his head in my chest.*
 - a) The village could have *stoned him to death* for the disgrace upon his family & village. **But** if they threw any stones they would have hit the father.
- H. **Best Robe** – **Wait...Isn't this the #1 sons?** (Isn't everything?)

- I. **Ring** – Full welcome. Indicate proof of son-ship.
- J. **Sandals** – Entire restoration. Again indicate son-ship was restored, *not a servant*.
- K. **Fatted Calf** – Veal.
- L. **Eat & be merry** – I'm sure the prodigal was **happy** to be home...**but** never to be compared to **the joy** the Father has of *him coming home*.

V. Slide16 **CLEAN SINNERS (25-30)**

- A. You may think the elder son has a pretty good *beef* **then** you've missed it completely.
[*speaking of beef, that's my beef isn't it?*]
- B. The younger son was an **open sinner**; the older brother a **hidden one**.
The one an **unrighteous son**; the older a **self-righteous son**.
The one **extremely wicked**; the other **extremely moral**.
- C. Don't miss it...the elder brother **IS** the **Pharisee**. This is like, when we come to church & think the Scriptures are for *everyone else*.
- D. This son was devoted to his fathers **law**, & his fathers **service**, **but** entirely out of sympathy with his fathers **heart**.
 1. Listen to the father speak directly to the Pharisees & Scribes, with such **compassion**. (This comes before the Woe unto you's)
 - a) They were so devoted to the law & service of God but completely missed His heart.
 2. He should have **imitated** his father's heart toward the returning prodigal.
Instead he turned into one...*hard, cold, & unforgiving*.
- E. **Wouldn't go in** – Pouting on the porch.
 1. His real issue was with **dad not** lil brother.
 - a) A problem with dad's **forgiveness**, resentful towards **mercy**, angry towards **grace**...**thus** he wouldn't go in.
 - b) They wouldn't understand the death bed conversion of **the thief on the cross**; **nor** the forgiveness shown **the woman caught in the very act of adultery**.
 - c) **When you see sin, do you react with disgust or with compassion?**
- F. **So what's this sons issues?**
 1. His relationship with his father was as if it was **Master-Slave** (29a)

- a) (NIV) *Look...all these years I've been **slaving** for you.*
- b) **Exposed:** It had been years of **grim duty** not of *loving service*.
(1) I'm looking for a **son** not a *slave*.

VI. Slide17 THE PARDONING FATHERS RESPONSE (28,31,32)

- A. His response was so gracious & patient. Again, he helps *this son* with just as much compassion & love.
 - 1. His father came out (*of the party*) – He didn't get mad. **He came out.**
 - 2. **Pleaded** with him – Didn't command him to come in.
 - a) **Come in son & rejoice with me** (6,9) **but** the Pharisees couldn't rejoice.
 - b) The imperfect indicates *he kept on beseeching him*. (LKGNT)
 - c) See, **Jesus came to save hypocrites**.
 - d) He doesn't want to hear, *"I'll come to church", "I'll keep clean", "I'll be good"*, **that's not what He wants**. **He wants relationship with you.**
 - 3. **Son** – **not** my **servant**, **not** my **slave**, he **never** joins him on his turf.
 - 4. **You are always with me** – we **eat** together, we **live** together.
 - a) **But, you never gave me a young goat. A goat?** (you're the heir for Pete's sake)
 - b) *I don't want you father, I want **a goat feast** with my friends.*
 - c) **He's a prodigal without the guts to leave.** John Piper
 - d) **He isn't home.** He doesn't love being w/his father. **We old Christians are so vulnerable to this.**
- B. (32) The story is left open-ended...The curtain fell w/o hearing the older son's response to his father's entreaty.
- C. Slide18 **Henri Nouwen** first saw himself in the **prodigal** son, the **older** son. Then as the **father** (note Rembrandt painted *the father* with his face). Stages of life.
 - 1. He lurks in his paintings - not just in his famous self-portraits, but also in some subtle and not-so-subtle self-portraits embedded in other paintings and engraved works. One suspects that Rembrandt's self-portraits were not only a reflection of his identity, but also an attempt to forge his identity.

2. Slide19 i.e. **The Raising of the Cross** (1633). Rembrandt depicts himself wearing an extravagant beret (he subsequently made it the trademark of an artist) in the center of the painting as the main person erecting the cross.

D. Slide20 Prodigal symbolizes tax collectors/sinners. Elder brother symbolizes Pharisees/Scribes.

1. Before Christ we are either extremely wicked or extremely moral.

2. Are you the open sinner or the hidden one? [*I think I was both!!!*]

3. **Come** out of the pig sty, or **Come** off the porch...but **Come**.

a) **Come** prodigal sons, prodigal daughters; prodigal husbands, prodigal wives; prodigal grandmothers, prodigal grandfathers...**Come**.