

Sermon Text: Luke 15:1 – 3; 11 – 32
Sermon Theme: What is Your Reaction to the Amazing Grace of Your Heavenly Father?

1. Are You Filled with Resentment?
Or...
2. Are You Filled with Rejoicing?

Now the tax collectors and "sinners" were all gathering around to hear him. But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them." Then Jesus told them this parable: "There was a man who had two sons. The younger one said to his father, 'Father, give me my share of the estate.' So he divided his property between them. "Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living. After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything. "When he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired men have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired men.' So he got up and went to his father. "But while he 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. "The son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' "But the father said to his servants, 'Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' So they began to celebrate. "Meanwhile, the older son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. So he called one of the servants and asked him what was going on. 'Your brother has come,' he replied, 'and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.' "The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him. But he answered his father, 'Look! All these years I've been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!' " "My son,' the father said, 'you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' "

How do you refer to this parable of Jesus? Many have referred to it as the "Parable of the Prodigal (Wasteful) Son". Our NIV Bibles refer to it as the "Parable of the Lost Son". But if we take a closer look at this parable of Jesus, the main focus is not the younger son, or the older son for that matter. The "main character" in this parable is the father. Today, as we spent some time discussing this parable of Jesus, we will focus our thoughts on the love of the father. The father in Jesus' parable represents God the Father. So, the question for you to consider this morning is, "What is your reaction to the amazing grace of your heavenly Father?" Are you filled with resentment? Or, are you filled with rejoicing?

In this parable, both sons struggle with the sin of resentment. The younger son resented the fact that he had to live under his father's roof. He wanted to be on his own. Jesus begins his parable in this way, "There was a man who had two sons. The younger one said to his father, 'Father, give me my share of the estate.' So he divided his property between them. Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living." At the end of the parable, we see the resentment of the older son. Jesus tells us about him: "The older brother became angry...So his father went out and pleaded with him. But he answered his father, 'Look! All these years I've been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!'" In love for both his sons, the father answers, "My son, you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found."

What is your reaction to the amazing grace of your heavenly father? There are news reports that, before he was killed in prison, the mass murderer, Jeffery Dahmer, was led by the Holy Spirit to believe in Jesus as his Savior and that he repented of his sins. If this is true, then we will see Jeffery Dahmer in heaven. What is your very first and honest reaction to the thought that Jeffery Dahmer might be among the Saints Triumphant in heaven? Is it the same as the older brother in this parable? What is your reaction when you see someone coming to the Lord's Supper whom you haven't seen in some time? Is your very first reaction, "I bet they are here just to get off the Elders' delinquent list?" Each one of us will confess that we have allowed the Old Adam, the sinful nature, to control our attitude and to fill our hearts with resentment when we see the amazing love of our heavenly Father

welcome home someone we consider a “terrible sinner”. But then we hear from God’s Word that we are just as terrible a sinner, and that we don’t deserve the love of God the Father anymore than anyone else. We hear God’s Word tell us that what we deserve for our sins is not God’s love but rather his full wrath and anger over sin as we suffer forever in hell.

But then we hear the Good News of the Gospel. We hear God’s Word proclaim to us the amazing grace of our Savior-God. Jesus is not resentful. Jesus did not resent the fact that he had to suffer and die for your sins and mine. Jesus came to this earth as our perfect substitute and willingly offered up his body and blood as the full payment price for all sins, including our sin of resentment toward the love of God the Father for all sinners. It is God the Holy Spirit, working through the powerful Word of our God, who leads you and me to say in the words of Isaiah chapter 12, “I will praise you, O LORD. Although you were angry with me, your anger has turned away and you have comforted me. Surely God is my salvation; I will trust and not be afraid. The LORD, the LORD, is my strength and my song; he has become my salvation.”

This leads us back to the question before us today: What is your reaction to the amazing grace of your heavenly Father? Rather than being filled with resentment, are you filled with rejoicing?

As the parable begins, we see how the younger son wants nothing to do with his father. All he wanted was his money, so he could go blow it on a wild lifestyle. After the money ran out, and his stomach was empty, the younger son came back to his father, humbly willing to work as one of us father’s hired men. As the younger son returned home, we are told, “While he 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. The son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’ But the father said to his servants, ‘Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let’s have a feast and celebrate.’” Notice the joy of the father to have his son home. In love, he had been watching and waiting for his son to come home. In love, the sins of the younger son are forgiven and forgotten; never to be brought up again. In love, now that his younger son is home safe and sound, the father wants to celebrate. At this point in his life, the younger son knew he didn’t deserve the love of his father. While Jesus doesn’t give us any more details about the younger son, our minds paint a picture of a young man at this “homecoming party”, with a big smile on his face, filled with rejoicing. Why this rejoicing? Because, as the father says, “This son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.”

The hymn writer, John Newton, who is the author of the hymn “Amazing Grace”, experienced firsthand the love of his heavenly Father. John Newton was an unbeliever. He wanted nothing to do with Jesus. He was living only for himself. But then the Holy Spirit, working through the Word of God, changed his heart. He came to believe in Jesus as his Savior. Filled with rejoicing in his forgiveness through Jesus, John Newton wrote the hymn “Amazing Grace”, in which he writes,

Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound,
That saved a wretch like me.
I once was lost but now am found,
Was blind, but now I see.

What is your reaction to the amazing grace of your heavenly Father? Like the younger son in this parable of Jesus, you and I will confess that we don’t deserve the love of our Savior-God. You and I are guilty of rebelling against the will of God our Father. Far too often we give in to the temptation of thinking that all our life’s pleasures will be found in the things of this world. When we take an honest look at our hearts and lives, you and I will humbly confess to our Father in heaven, “I am no longer worthy to be called your son.” “I am not longer worthy to be called your daughter.”

It is then that God the Father runs up to you and me, throwing his loving arms around us. Because Jesus was willing to go the way of the cross for you and me, because Jesus paid in full the price for all sin, you and I are filled with rejoicing for the forgiveness of all of our sins. Because of Jesus, when we see a Brother or Sister in Christ repent of their sins, we join our voices with the angel choirs of heaven in rejoicing in the Good News of full and free forgiveness of all sins.

In our Gospel Lesson last week from Luke chapter 13, we heard Jesus say, “Unless you repent, you too will all perish.” In his parable today, Jesus asks you and me: “What is your reaction to the amazing grace of your heavenly Father? Are you filled with resentment? Or, are you filled with rejoicing? Offering all praise to our Savior-God for the forgiveness of all of our sins through our Savior, Jesus Christ, with hearts filled with joy, may each one of us say in the words of Isaiah 12:4 – 6, “Give thanks to the LORD, call on his name; make known among the nations what he has done, and proclaim that his name is exalted. Sing to the LORD, for he has done glorious things; let this be known to all the world. Shout aloud and sing for joy!” Amen.

