

A Sunday Thought: Create That Empty Space in Your Hearts

A Reflection on the Parable of the Prodigal Son

Reflections Grace, Sin and Transformation 26 April 2020

Luke 15:11-32

How do we welcome home our lost brothers, sisters, sons, and daughters? I mean those lost spiritually — wandering, lost in the world, finding no solace, lost but wanting to return to Jesus and having no notion of how to do it. Would it be enough to welcome them by running out to them, embracing them, richly clothing them, and celebrating their return with a grand party for friends and others?

I would say that is not enough. When we take them into our homes, our societies, our churches, we must do so without asking for excuses or explanations — without even allowing them to offer one of their own — but show our immense joy, and make them feel welcome in our hearts. This is the lesson I have learnt from the parable Jesus told of the prodigal son (read Luke 15:11-32).

When we shift our focus from the prodigal son to the father — we normally fix our attention on the son — we see that the father suffered greatly. He saw his younger son leave, fully aware of the disappointment, rejection, abuse, dejection, and depression his son would face. He suffered, day in and day out, thinking about him. He saw his older son grow progressively bitter and angry, so much so that the grieving father could not offer him affection and support. If we place the parable in a time frame, we find that most of the father's life had been spent in waiting. He understood that he could not force his younger son to return, nor make the older one let go of his resentment. Only they could take the initiative to stop the backslide and turn back.

During those long years, the father cried many tears and died many a death. He was "emptied out" by suffering. But that very emptiness created a place to welcome his two sons when the time of their return came. We are called to be like that father, learning from our Heavenly Father. Jesus is at once a Father and a Mother to us. He embraces us with both a mother's hand and a father's hand: the one caressing, consoling, and comforting; the other supporting, encouraging, and empowering.

If we give it serious thought — both from a personal perspective and as a church — we will often realise that we simply let go of people who do not conform to what we think is the right way, and do nothing to tell them our doors are open to them. We must remember that all of us have

been "prodigal sons and daughters" at one time or another; perhaps we are one at this very moment. There is no "us" and "them." We are called to play the right role: the one returning to Jesus, and the other being a father and mother to those who want to return home.

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