

St. Bartholomew

4th Sun in Lent

March 14, 2010

Luke 15:1-2,11-32

In our gospel for today, Jesus is having supper with some of the lowlife in town. They're drinking and cutting up. There's a drug dealer over in the corner. This other guy steals cars and resells the parts. Another guy sells stolen guns. And there's several less-than-proper ladies there. And they're all laughing - the music is loud.

But then Jesus lets them know that He's going to tell a story. So they turn the music down and perk up their ears - because Jesus is known for His stories.

And it's the story about this rich boy who tells his daddy that he wants all of his inheritance now. He doesn't want to wait and work all of his life until the old man dies. He wants to play and have fun now.

So you're thinking, "Ah, he's just going to laugh in this kid's face." But no, the father goes out - cashes in his 401K's - and hands this 20 year old guy \$100,000. A \$100,000 cash!!!

The kid can't believe his eyes! He's like, "YES!" He thanks his Dad - and he is outta there.

Well, the first thing that he does is go and buy a hot looking car. He goes to the big city. And it's party time! Hitting the bars, hitting the clubs. There's booze and drugs and women. He's got friends around him all the time.

And all of the drug dealers at the party where Jesus is at - they're going, "Oh yeah. We know that boy."

But after awhile, the money runs out. It's a down economy - so he can't get a decent job. He sells the car to pay the rent. But eventually he gets kicked out of his apartment. And finally, he's living downtown in the homeless shelter. No friends. No money. And he has just wasted everything he ever had.

But he thinks - I'll bet my Dad will take me back. He's a really loving guy. Sometimes he even gives jobs to people who can barely work. I'll bet I can go back home - and at least get a job working for Dad.

So he calls Dad up to see if He will buy him a ticket on the bus home. And Dad says, "YES!" As a matter of fact, he seemed pretty happy about it.

So all the way home, the younger son is thinking about where he's going to live - maybe in the bunkhouse with the other workers. That'll be great compared with having nothing and living at the shelter.

But as He is telling this story, a funny thing starts happening at the party where Jesus is. Everything gets real quiet. Everybody's thinking. They're thinking of the home that they got kicked out of. They're thinking of their mother who's probably worried sick about them... And their father who is so

disappointed. Sometimes angry, but mostly just terribly disappointed - to have a drug dealer as a son - a prostitute as a daughter.

And they're thinking - "I wonder what it would be like to go back. I wonder if my parents could ever forgive me. Would they help me to start over again?"

But Jesus' story goes on. The young man arrives at the bus station - and his old man is standing right there. Smiling from ear to ear. The son starts this big apology that he has prepared. But his father says, "Just forget about it."

And the first thing he does is take his son out to eat at this real nice restaurant. Steaks and shrimp and whatever he wants. And the father starts telling his son about this big party that he's got planned for him. But first they have to go out and get some really nice clothes to wear.

So they spend a few hours shopping. And as the day wears on - they head home. As they get closer, there's cars lined up down the block. There's no place to park. They have to walk half a block to the house.

And you can hear this band playing - and people laughing. You can smell the bar-b-q cooking. And when he gets there - everyone shouts, "Welcome home!" And his Dad looks at him and smiles. And he hands him his own credit card - and says,

"Anything that you need - car, clothes, whatever - just put it on this card. It's good to have you home."

And the people listening to Jesus' story can't believe their ears. The Dad was supposed to chew his son out. The son was supposed to work like a dog - just to earn back some respect. He's supposed to be humiliated - not get a new car and his father's credit card. The drug dealer and the users and the ladies are just stunned. "There's no way! Jesus must not be talking about regular people. And God would never be so loving - at least not the God that we have heard about. Could God really love me that much? To forgive me of everything that I've done? To give me a new life... To let me get out of this hell-hole and live with respect again?"

Now across the street, at a corner café - you can see some of the preachers in town and some of their leading council members. And they are obviously chewing Jesus' disciples out. "How can your preacher be eating and drinking with those people over there. They're the ones who break into your house. They're the ones who shoot at each other in the street - with little children playing outside. What kind of a preacher is He!?"

You can tell what they're saying, because their faces are so red and angry.

But then Jesus goes on with the story, "Now the older brother had been out working at the store that the family owned. He had been working there since he was 12. Every day after school - stocking shelves, running the register. Now he orders everything - checks the deliveries.

And he drives up to the house - but he can't find a parking spot either. And as he gets out of his car. He hears music and laughter - and he stops someone and asks them what's going on. "Your brother has come home - and your Dad has thrown him this big party!" And he says, "Well, tell my Father that I will NEVER be a part of that party."

And then the Father comes out to the older brother. And the old brother starts yelling at his Dad. Chewing him out for wasting money on this worthless son. Chewing him out for trusting him and spending all of their hard-earned money. "I have to work all of the time. I never get even a little party. I open the store and close the store every night. And you spend all of my work on this loser!"

And the people listening to Jesus shake their head, "Yeah, that is what the church people would say to me. They wouldn't want me walking in there with my child who was born without a father. Yeah, they wouldn't want me in there if they knew that I used drugs and couldn't get a job. They wouldn't want me and

my friends and our piercings and tattoos. They ain't got no time for me."

But the Father says to the older son, "Son, you know that everything that I have is yours. But this brother of yours was dead - and is now alive. He was living in hell - but now he has come home!"

And the drug dealers and the prostitutes and the homeless people wonder - is God really that way? Does God really care - about me?

And it does make you wonder. Often times, we as the church are the older brother. We are the establishment - the seemingly righteous. And yet, when it comes to truly sacrificing our hard-earned money for those in need - we hesitate.

You can see this kind of hesitation in the debate about National Health Care. We know God wants us to care for all of His children - and yet, we fear how much it is going to cost. While we sit with houses that are paid for, jobs that are secure, or padded retirement accounts.

We, the older brothers ask, "What is it going to cost me? And what am I going to get out of it?"

We who have health insurance ask, "What did they do to deserve this?"

And yet, our Father in heaven has blessed you and me with all that we are - and all that we have. Everything that God has

- all of life and all of eternity is yours. What should we withhold that our brothers and sisters may have basic medical care and life as well?

Come and join the party of salvation - that we may all sing of God's grace and favor. In the Name of Jesus.

Amen