

“GRACE ALL THE WAY HOME (#3): THE COMPASSIONATE HEART”

(Luke 15:20b-25,28-32)

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[Cornerstone U.M.C.; 9-25-22]

--I--

1. [BOTH Services... Read CEB Text: Luke 15:20b-25, 28-32 and Pray.]
2. For the last two weeks, we've shared in a series called Grace All the Way Home in which we've been talking about the Grace of God: What is it? Why is it so important? And what does it look like in our daily lives?
3. And we've answered these questions through the lens of one of Jesus' most famous parables: "*The Parable of the Prodigal Son*," found in Luke 15.
4. But as I mentioned last week, it should more accurately be called "*The Parable of the Man With Two Sons*" or perhaps even "*The Parable of the Loving Father*," because the *real* hero of this story is not *either* of the sons, but the father himself.

A--You see, more than anything else, it's a story about a *compassionate father* (who represents God), and about his offer of grace (i.e., the party) *TO* both sons (who represent two ways we humans typically respond to God's offer of grace).

B--So, what I want to do today is talk about the qualities of God's Grace shown by the father in this story: What were they? And how might we learn to practice them better in our lives today?

--II--

5. First, in this story the father illustrates that the Grace of God is **FORGIVING**.

A--Now, what's surprising (at least to me) is that this story contains no *explicit* mention of the father ever offering forgiveness. Think about it...

1--When the prodigal finally decides to come home, he plans to *ask* for forgiveness by asking to be treated like a hired servant (which was actually *worse than* being treated like a slave, who at least was a member of the household!).

2--But when he gets home, the father never actually *let's* him ask it -- he doesn't make him grovel in penitence (as was supposed to happen in Jewish custom). He doesn't rub his son's nose in his mistakes, or say "*I told you so!*"

3--He doesn't even make a big show of his own magnanimous offer of mercy: "*Well, I guess I'll forgive you this time. But you gotta' understand... this is really hard for me to do, so don't be doing it again, or else you can forget it!*"

4--Instead, Verse 20 says that before the son could blurt out his carefully rehearsed plea for mercy, the father was calling the servants to bring gifts to the son -- almost as if the father's forgiveness was *implied* simply by the act of the prodigal being *welcomed home*.

B--The story is told that President Abraham Lincoln was once asked how he would treat the returning Confederate States following the Civil War.

1--Expecting him to talk about punishment or vengeance, the questioner was surprised when Lincoln said, "*I will treat them as if they'd never been away.*" <sup>1</sup>

2--*That's* how God treats us. When you and I "come home" to Him, in that very act, we experience God's forgiveness, because Grace (first of all) is *Forgiving* -- So, who is it that *you* need to forgive today?

6. A second quality of God's Grace that we learn from the father in this story is that it is **GENEROUS** (Verses 22-23, 31).

A--For the last few weeks I've mentioned that although grace *includes* forgiveness, it goes *beyond* it -- that grace also includes lavish giving to those who *don't* deserve it.

B--In this parable, all of the prodigal's undeserved gifts (i.e., the robe, rings, sandals, and fatted calf, as well as the party itself) are metaphors for the lavish generosity of God's unmerited grace.

1--As I've said before, I can think of many times in my own life when I did things I wasn't proud of -- things that didn't honor God, my family, my church, or myself

2--But also as I've said, while these behaviors *did* carry consequences, in none of them was I ever discarded or rejected simply *because* of my wrongdoing, but instead was given undeserved love and grace.

C--So, over the years I've come to believe that if God has been generous with me, then I need to be generous back with Him and with others: to be generous with *GOD* with my time, talents, money, and passion; and then to be generous with *OTHERS* in my offer of love the way God is generous with me. Are you that way towards others, too?

7. A third quality of God's Grace which the father illustrates in this parable is **PATIENCE**.

A--Now, the story doesn't tell us what the father did while his younger son was away, but some of you know about this firsthand, because you've had a child, a spouse, or other loved one leave home and not want anything more to do with you.

1--You can't call or go to them. All you can do is to patiently and prayerfully wait, & wait, & wait -- wait until God gets hold of them & they come home.

2--And, as hard as it must have been, that's *exactly* what this father did (Verse 12)  
 -- grace enabled him to *wait patiently*.

3--But *not* just for his *younger* son. No. Verses 29-32 tell us that when the *older* son was so upset about the party, the father went out to talk with him, and when he sensed his son needed to vent, he patiently listened.

B--Now, I don't know about you, but *I* have a hard time with *this* one -- when I'm in a position to see the mistakes of myself and others, quite often I'm impatient and want to "fix" it (and them) *now*, rather than waiting on God's larger plan to unfold.

[I've heard it said that impatience is "*waiting in a hurry*"; and that's certainly what many of us have experienced with people in our society over the last 2 years of the pandemic!]

1--Yet, this story teaches us that true grace is *patient* -- it sometimes loves by *standing back* and allowing others to exercise *their* free will, and for God's will to unfold in its own *way*, in its own *time*.

2--Now, one thing to note here: Grace is not *passive* in the sense of letting people walk all over us (or oppressing others), but instead is *active* in the sense of intentionally *believing in* the power of hope.

3--Verse 20 says that "*while [the prodigal] was still far off, his father saw him....*" For this father to have *seen* his son at such a distance, he must have been already actively *watching* for him -- *that* is active, hopeful patience!

C--So, to whom do you need to offer that kind of hope and patience today? ...Someone who may not *deserve* it, but to whom grace says you need to *offer* it anyway?

8. Finally, from the actions of this compassionate father, we learn that the Grace of God is also **EVEN-HANDED**-- it doesn't discriminate or make distinctions.

A--In the parable, remember that the father's love and wealth was given equally to *both* of his sons -- he didn't play favorites between them.

B--And this means that no matter who we are or what we've done, we can trust God to treat us all the *same* --unlike the inequities & inequalities that have been highlighted recently in our world today, God's Grace *doesn't* treat different people differently:

1--No. It treats the sinner the same as the saint,

2--...The drug addict the same as one with perfect worship attendance,

3--...The poor homeless drifter the same as the rich mansion owner,

4--...The one who drives a beat up Chevy the same as the one who drives a Lexus,

5--Grace treats someone w/*one* skin color no differently than someone w/*another*,

6--...someone who's gay no differently than someone who's straight,

7--...someone of one political party no differently than someone of another,

8--...someone who worships God in a *contemporary* way no differently than someone who worships God a *traditional* way.

C--My point is that the Grace of God is the *great equalizer* of life -- human stereotypes, barriers, borders and prejudices don't exist within it (praise the Lord!).

D--So, is *your* practice of grace towards others even-handed, just as Jesus' was?

--III--

9. Yes, it's true that Grace is *not* easy to practice or share, because it is ***Forgiving, Generous, Patient, and Even-handed*** -- four things that we humans tend *NOT* to be!

A--Yet, I believe that Jesus tells this now famous parable partly *so that* we can not only *experience* God's Grace in our *own* lives, but be able to *pass it on* to others, as well.

B--So, have you experienced this kind of Grace in your life? If so, then are you *living* in and through it *daily*? And if not, then why not give it a try *today*?

C--You see, we're all invited to allow our "*Compassionate Father*" (God, the one throwing the party for us to begin with!) to fill our hearts with His love, and to give to each of us His forgiving, generous, patient, even-handed GRACE.

10. [PRAYER]

**ENDNOTE:**

<sup>1</sup> Cited from <https://www.billygraham.ca/stories/a-living-hope/>. This story is also found in William Barclay's New Testament Commentary on Luke 15:11-32, "*The Story of the Loving Father*," found online at <https://www.dannychesnut.com/Bible/Barclay/Luke.htm>.