

The Threshold

King of Glory Lutheran Church

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Year C: Lent 4: Luke 15:1-3, 11b-32

¹Now all the tax collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to [Jesus.] ²And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, "This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them."

³So he told them this parable: ^{11b}"There was a man who had two sons. ¹²The younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of the property that will belong to me.' So he divided his property between them. ¹³A few days later the younger son gathered all he had and traveled to a distant country, and there he squandered his property in dissolute living. ¹⁴When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that country, and he began to be in need. ¹⁵So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs. ¹⁶He would gladly have filled himself with the pods that the pigs were eating; and no one gave him anything. ¹⁷But when he came to himself he said, 'How many of my father's hired hands have bread enough and to spare, but here I am dying of hunger! ¹⁸I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; ¹⁹I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands.'" ²⁰So he set off and went to his father. But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him. ²¹Then the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' ²²But the father said to his slaves, 'Quickly, bring out a robe—the best one—and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. ²³And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; ²⁴for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!' And they began to celebrate.

²⁵"Now his elder son was in the field; and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. ²⁶He called one of the slaves and asked what was going on. ²⁷He replied, 'Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has got him back safe and sound.' ²⁸Then he became angry and refused to go in. His father came out and began to plead with him. ²⁹But he answered his father, 'Listen! For all these years I have been working like a slave for you, and I have never disobeyed your command; yet you have never given me even a young goat so that I might celebrate with my friends. ³⁰But when this son of yours came back, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fatted calf for him!' ³¹Then the father said to him, 'Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. ³²But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found.'"

God loves us when we don't deserve love. God loves us when we try to earn love. God loves us. Period. Stand in the doorway and watch. Listen!

God's love is for us today and always. Amen.

We might have thought this story was about two sons and a father, but there are thresholds all over this story! A threshold is a strip of metal or wood, or a series of stones at the bottom of a doorway that one must cross over to go in or come out. Here at King of Glory we have thresholds under all of our many doors. People come and go throughout the week for worship and work. But now think for a moment about all the thresholds you and I have passed through in our lifetimes.

We left home to join the military or go to school. To get that first important job which brought us independence from our parents. Or to get married and cross through the doorway of a new life with a new person. All of the places we have entered which changed our lives for better or worse.

The younger son in Jesus' story wanted to cross over into a new chapter in his life. He did the unthinkable in his day, to ask for his portion of the inheritance prior to his father's death. In an honor/shame culture, his request was as good as saying to his Dad, "You are dead to me."

It's not hard to imagine what comes next. With bags packed, his every step takes him farther away from the life he knew and closer to all he has dreamed of. A young adult flush with extra cash, feeling the thrill of having newfound freedom, he enjoys the pleasures of life. Meals, nights out, women and wine. With no thought of what shame he is bringing upon himself, he relishes being out from under his father's thumb.

We can relate to this younger son. His desire to get away from authority, from work, and from responsibility. Work will always be there, so let's go pa...rty! Who hasn't taken delight in bright lights and hours of fun as we escape our day-to-day concerns? A party for the neighbor, a party for the stranger, no excuse is needed to turn up the music and have a goooooo time! Seize the day!

For some of us, this younger son is one of our own family members. Or a friend we've worried about. Just the way Jesus describes him, makes us cringe with memories or laugh at our own stupid choices in the day. We know those temptations, we've felt the consequences of our indulgence into the good life.

Yet...we too can relate to the older son. Instead of crossing the threshold into the unknown, he feels like it's his obligation to take on increased responsibilities for his younger sibling who has just left town. Morning after morning, he steps over that threshold, leaving the house to go out to the fields. There is little joy in his work. He does what must be done. Day after day. It's the right thing to do, so one must do it.

Who is the older son in our lives? Is it we, picking up the pieces for a sibling who lives too far away to care for parents? Are we the dutiful, responsible one who knows that people are counting on us so we cannot pause for self-care? We know, the long hours of work with little recognition. How can everyone else be off playing when there are more tasks on the list? Or perhaps the older son is a loved one who misses out on family outings and Birthday parties, sending the silent message that work is more important than relationships. Elder sons live in the pain of insecurity, that they aren't enough.

It often feels in this story, like we are supposed to choose between the younger or elder son. But the father doesn't make a choice; he crosses the threshold twice. He crosses the threshold twice!

He goes running out of the house to meet his youngest child, the one whom he hasn't seen for months. Before the child can even speak his practiced speech, the loving father has hugged and kissed this son. It's as if it was the very first time to see him! This dad doesn't say, "You're forgiven." He demonstrates with words and actions the love that fills his heart. "Go kill the fatted calf! Bring the robe and ring!"

Then, when the party is rocking, the elder son stands outside refusing to go in. His bitterness keeps him from relationships. Once again, the father crosses the threshold to go to this dutiful child. Once again, he demonstrates with words how much this child is loved. The father pleads with him to come inside, saying, "All of mine is yours!"

There is generosity for both sons; gifts given and a sharing of wealth. There is love for each son; the father aches to have both sons inside the party. The younger son arrives home wanting to be a slave, while the elder feels like a slave; yet this father doesn't see slaves, he delights over both his sons. He crossed the threshold twice to go outside to each of beloved sons.

God loves like this father loves. God loves like this father.

We see ourselves in the younger son and we think, “I don’t deserve this love.” That’s true! We don’t. For which one of us hasn’t squandered away time or lost a relationship or wasted money. We come back with head hung low, not knowing if we’ll be accepted. We have all sinned against others and God.

We don’t deserve God’s love and yet God runs to embrace us and love us.

We see ourselves in the elder son, always trying to earn God’s attention and favor. We still believe there really and truly is some hidden point system by which if we pray enough or read the Bible enough or do enough good works, then surely God will love us. Our insecurity of self and fear of being overlooked only makes us try harder.

No! God says, “You are always with me. All mine is yours! Come into the party! This party is for both of you! For all my children. ”

This is the way God loves. This is the way God loves us.

As we come to the threshold of Holy Communion, we reach over what we know into the reality of what God knows. God sees us as we are and loves us anyway. God forgives the wrongs we’ve done and the wrongs we do to ourselves. Our outstretched hand holds the bread of forgiveness, and our lips taste the wine of new life. This is the party of God given for you and me, whoever we are and whatever we’ve done.

Come to the threshold, taste and see, the way God loves. Amen.

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/www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=3992)