

“Praise!”

03-13-16

Our focus this morning is Praise. **Praise**? This is **Lent**! Praise isn't a faith expression used during the season of Lent! We even bury the “Alleluia”, not resurrecting it until Easter morning when we celebrate the risen Savior, Jesus Christ! It seems odd to use this word when we've shifted our primary focus to repentance during these forty days of Lent!

So let's also shift our thinking! Could it be that **Praise is not Shallow Happiness**? Could it instead be **an Expression of Gratitude to a Merciful and Compassionate God**? Could it be talking about a God Who celebrates when the lost are found? In the story of the Prodigal Son, Jesus reveals that praise and thanksgiving are captured in a party full of joy.

The beauty of a story that's been told over and over again, is that we have the opportunity to see every detail of the story and get comfortable with it. But there's also a danger. With this story being told and retold, we might become so familiar with it that it might cause us to gloss over the messages embedded in it so we might miss the picture of who God is in the story or how God sees us!

This story is another gift from God. Last week we looked at the younger son who went off on his own. Today, while many, if not most, identify with the younger son or the older brother, how important it's for us to become LIKE the father! Let's look at the father and get wrapped up in his struggle and loss, but also his joy! The words of Jesus remind us to be compassionate as your Father in heaven is compassionate.

In the story, he was the proud father of two sons. Like all parents, he worried about them and knew how different they were from each another, but how alike they were as well! He loved them both with a deep, abiding, and abounding love!

But when the younger son came to him to say he was leaving home and wanted his share of the inheritance, it cut through the father like a knife! His leaving was more than separation from the father's love, he was also cutting himself off from family and friends! The father was devastated and filled with grief! He, just like all of us who are parents, wanted to take him by the shoulders and shake some sense into him! But he had no choice, he had to let him go!

The Father Lost His Son! As he watched him go, the father's eyes filled with tears. His heart was broken beyond words. His son was lost to him, and he didn't plan on him returning! There was no sound of praise and jubilation in the house. Despite his leaving, the father vowed he would NEVER stop loving him and waiting for his return home!

But the father had one more son! His older son was laboring in the fields with other hired workers. He was obedient and worked hard. He made the father grateful. But for all the good this son did, when his brother left, the older brother didn't go out of his way to go out and find him and bring him back. No, it's like he almost said, *“Don't let the door hit you in the back when you leave!”*

Because of the lack of love and care for each other, **the Father Lost His Sons**. In the beginning of the story, **One was lost to Self and Folly** and at the end, **One was lost to Jealousy and Resentment!**

Look at Luke 15. The parable that began with total disruption of the family, starts to get much better. Looking out at the distant horizon, the father spotted someone walking. At first,

he thought it was a mirage! The father realized, the closer he came, this was, indeed, his own lost son! He ran to him! His heart leapt with joy! He felt nothing but praise and thanksgiving! His son, who was dead, was alive and returned! There's no other word to describe his joy than PRAISE!

This kind of praise cannot be contained! Verses 22-24, *"But the father said to his servants, 'Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet. And bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate. For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.' And they began to celebrate."*

It was quite a homecoming bash! But it was something else for the older brother! Look at verses 25-30, *"Now his older son was in the field, and as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing. And he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant. And he said to him, 'Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fattened calf, because he has received him back safe and sound.' But he was angry and refused to go in. His father came out and entreated him, but he answered his father, 'Look, these many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command, yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him!'"*

The father shared with the older son that the party was to celebrate a life that had been lost, was now found. His brother was alive! He invited him to the party, hoping the love he had for his younger brother would trump his jealousy and resentment. But he didn't come in!

Moving from fear and resentment to joy and love is moving in God-modeled generosity! During this time of Lent, we focus our attention on all that Jesus did for us as He came to earth, suffered, and died in hatred from the world, but showed great love to the very end on the cross, *"Father forgive them, for they know not what they do."*

It isn't logical, but this story helps it make sense! Sometimes **It's Not Easy to be Compassionate and Forgiving!** Even with the people that are closest to us. Our hearts want to be filled with joy and praise, but we want it on our own terms!

We are **Called to Love One Another with the same Selfless Love God, Our Father has for Us! Praise God, when the Lost, IS Found!** Give praise to God for that other person, no matter who it is, no matter what they've done!

From the book, The Prodigal God, listen to Timothy Keller's thoughts on our homecoming celebration, *"Our future is not an impersonal form of consciousness. We will not float through the air, but rather will eat, embrace, sing, laugh, and dance in the Kingdom of God, in degrees of power, glory, and joy that we can't at preset imagine."*

Jesus will make the world our perfect home again. We will no longer be living "east of Eden," always wandering and never arriving. We will come, and the Father will meet us and embrace us, and we will be brought into the feast."

During Lent, and in every season, celebrate finding your true home in God. Let your lips be filled with praise as you live Lent as a person of the resurrection!