



ST. STEPHEN'S ANGLICAN CHURCH

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Sunday July 28, 2013 - Trinity 9

The passage selected for the sermon is taken from the second reading, the Parable of the Prodigal Son, which is also the Gospel for the 9th Sunday after Trinity:
“And he divided unto them his living.”

**✠ In The Name of The Father and of The Son
and of The Holy Ghost. Amen. ✠**

The Bishop's favorite subject is evangelism, and it's a subject that we should all hold dear to our hearts. But when we think about evangelism, more often than not we think about the Word being preached in a far away continent or in an isolated part of the city, and while that is evangelism, that isn't necessarily the evangelism that we're most directly called to participate in.

The real evangelism, the heart of evangelism, is the evangelism to our families, the people that are around us, those people that we love and yet who drive us crazy, or whom we drive crazy, as well. That's, above all, is our mission. Evangelism to the people to whom we are given most directly. So as we think about those folks, we have this beautiful parable that is about a father and his sons.

When I was a young priest, I drew long and convoluted theological theories about what the Prodigal Son might mean. As a man now, who has been around a little longer and has been through a couple of iterations of family, I realize it wasn't all that complicated, that it

really was pretty much about what it says. It's about God's love for us as family, about our being adopted into His living, His Life, as His family. And, because He gives us families to understand His love, it's about the way He wants us to emulate Him, the way He wants us to imitate Him, and the way He wants us to live within our own families. So let's take a look at the people that populated this parable.

First, there's the father, God the Father, who is all loving, and his son comes to him and asks for his living. What does he do? First of all, he gives both sons their living. He doesn't just give it to the one; he gives it to them both. And then he does something that we, as parents, find really, really hard: he gives the gift of freedom. He doesn't say, “You can have your living if you behave.” “You can have the car if you mow the lawn.” “You can have your date on Friday night if you do what I ask.” He has respect for his children, and with the love he has for them, he lets them on their own without tying his gift to some other expectation other than they go and learn their way.

Now those of us who have been parents know that the most terrifying thing in the world is the sound of a car in the driveway being turned on by your teenagers and hearing them drive away. Totally on their own, out of sight, and out of control, and yet because we try to be good parents, we let them do that -- we let them try to grow up. That's what our Heavenly Father does for us. He gives us the keys, even though we go careening into this life without much more experience than our teenage drivers and with as much danger to ourselves and others as they pose on the road, and yet He respects us, He loves us, He gives us the chance to find our way and to appreciate and come back home to Him.

The son who wasted his life in riotous living -- well, we have a bunch to learn from him, too, don't we? Not how to waste our life in riotous living, but how to come home from that. Humility. True repentance. The willingness to take a chance on asking for forgiveness. In families, how often is fear the obstacle that breaks families apart. People are afraid to ask for forgiveness because they don't believe or understand that we will forgive them. And how terrible it is that the devil can lay his claim in some heart because he makes us fear that we might not be forgiven by those people who love us most. It shows great courage on the part of that son to be willing to come and to ask for that forgiveness, and we need to emulate that son, his repentance, and his humility.

Finally, we have the good son, who doesn't necessarily give us a very good example, does he? He shows up and what does he exhibit? Well, start with jealousy, very quick to be angry, very, very quick to be offended and disrespectful, demanding, ungrateful. That's the way we are in our families way too often, isn't it? That's the source of most family discord, quick to anger, a little envy, unwilling to be gracious and grateful. So we put up walls against each other and shut each other out, when really we should be emulating the father

again because not only did he go out to meet the son who wasted his living, the prodigal son, but he left the celebration to go out again to meet the ungrateful son, to embrace him, and to offer him the chance to participate and to be joyful, and be part of the celebration of the reconciliation of the family.

As the Church sadly, we're too often the second son. We didn't go that far astray, didn't go that far away, but we can be the source of strife in the family as surely as the ones that run a little bit wild. This is something we have to be very, very careful of. We have to put away our envy, we have to put away our quick anger, we have to be more grateful, more willing to forgive.

It's a beautiful parable. If we live the lessons of this parable with the families that God has given us, if we emulate the lessons that are given here, then we will have been great evangelists. We will have been great evangelists to the people God most earnestly has given us to take care of -- the people who are close to us, the people who, though they might be the hardest to love, are the most important to love.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen