



**ST. STEPHEN'S**  
**ANGLICAN CHURCH**  
 11856 MAYS CHAPEL RD., TIMONIUM, MD 21093

**The 9<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Trinity**  
**July 29, 2018**

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

The passage selected for the sermon is taken from the Gospel.

A certain man had two sons, and the youngest said to his father, "Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth unto me", and he divided unto them his living.

We often talk about evangelizing as the way to grow the Church. Occasionally, we get the courage to say grace in public, to invite an acquaintance to services, or support a far away missionary. What we rarely do is evangelize in the special mission field that is unique to each of us, which are our own families. The reason we don't is because there is no harder place to exercise grace and forgiveness than with those people who know us the best.

When I was a young priest, I drew long and convoluted theological theories about what the Prodigal Son might mean. As an older man, who has been through a couple of generations of family, I realize the parable isn't all that complicated, that it really was about what it says. It's about God's love for us as family, about our being adopted into His living, His Life, and His inheritance. 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 to live within our own families. If we approach the Gospel today with that level of simplicity, we

can learn quite a lot from each of persons in the parable of the Prodigal Son.

First, there's the father, God our Father, who is all-loving. His youngest son comes to him and asks for his living. What does the father 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. As we progress through the parable, we will realize that there is nothing He gives the seemingly prodigal son that he doesn't also give to the good son, though the good son is quick to discount and ignore the gifts he receives.

Then he does something that we, as parents, find really, really hard: he gives the gift of freedom, or more rightly free will. He doesn't say, "You can have your living if you behave." "You can have the car if you mow the lawn," or "You can have my love if you do what I ask." He has enough respect for his children that he won't compel them to behave, or barter with them for their love. With the love he has for them, he lets them go on their own without tying his gift to any other expectation than that they go and learn their way, and with the hope that they will find their way back into His grace.

Now those of us who have been parents know that the most terrifying thing in the world is the sound of your teenager taking the car out for the night, totally on their own, out of sight, and out of our control. 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 to this life, free will, 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 the teens pose when they are on the road. And yet He respects us. He loves us. He gives us the chance to find our way, to learn that we should appreciate and come back home to Him.

The son who wasted his life in riotous living has a lot to teach us. Not how to waste our life in riotous living, but how to come home from that. Humility. Repentance. Courage. It requires courage to take a chance on asking for forgiveness. How often is that fear the obstacle that breaks families apart. How terrible it is that the devil can lay his claim in some hearts 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 forgiveness, and we need to emulate that son for his courage, repentance, and humility.

The father's response to the Son, when He was yet far off, is also instructive. The son's contrition was not perfect. It was self serving. It was posed as a negotiation. It fell short of asking for restoration. It never took into consideration the disrespect and hurtfulness the son inflicted on his father. It was also enough for the Father. Ultimately, the son's perfection in understanding the nature of love and forgiveness doesn't come from his imperfect contrition, the boy only learns from the grace of the father's embrace. He offers a worldly apology and he has perfect, Godly love returned to him.

Finally, we have the good son, who doesn't necessarily give us a very good example. When he shows up, what does he exhibit?

Well, start with jealousy. He is also very quick to be angry, and very, very quick to be offended, disrespectful, demanding, and ungrateful. That's the way we are in our families way too often, isn't it? That's the source of most family discord, quickness to anger, a little envy, unwillingness 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 who run a little bit wild. This is the lesson of the Gospel for us. We have to put away our envy, we have to put away our angry impatience, we have to be more grateful, grace-full, more willing to forgive, more willing to ask forgiveness.

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, then we will have become great evangelists. We will have been great evangelists to the people God most earnestly has given us to care for -- the people who, though they might be the hardest to love, are the most important to love, and God willing, we will bring them with us heaven.

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