

Text: Luke 15.25-32
St Stephen's

Feb 26th, 2006
Sun AM

The Brother Who Wouldn't Join the Party

We are in a series on Luke 15 for the whole month. That chapter features 3 of the most **famous stories** in the bible. Take out your Bible... Turn to page... (909)

Each of these stories are about **something that was lost**. The shepherd lost a sheep, the woman lost a silver coin and the father lost not one, but two sons. You can lose things in life. But when you lose something of great value, everything stops. And nothing is of more value in the world than people. People can get lost, and **lost people matter**.

In each of these stories, the loss prompted **an all out search**. The shepherd left the 99 and went after the lost sheep. The woman stopped her housework, lit a lamp, and swept the house clean till she found it. The father stood on the porch every night and scanned the horizon. Why the all out search? Because **lost people were missing**.

And last week Bill reminded us that in each of these stories there was a **great celebration** when what was lost was found. The shepherd called his friends and neighbors, the woman did the same, and the father cooked up the fatted calf, and threw a big party. Why the all out celebration? Because **something of great value was found**.

Here's the point: Jesus was always after people because people matter to God. Jesus wants us to get this straight. And that has been our prayer this month. He is **in the people business** and He wants us to be in the people business. If this is not what we are about, what ARE we about?

Well, as we finish the series today, we turn to the last half of the last story, the story of the older brother.

You remember that the lost son has come home. And the father has welcomed him with open arms, a royal robe and the family ring and served up veal steaks. This party is well under way, but the older son finds out about it and won't come in.

Right then is our first hint that this father doesn't just have one lost son. He has two. As a matter of fact...

Surprise! The Older Brother is Farther Away from the Father than the Younger Brother!

This is important to understand. Let's start with this idea: **you can be close to God and still be far away.**

Look at **the older son**...

And he said to him, 'Son, you are always with me...

But he was angry and refused to go in...

Luke 15:31, 28 (RSV)

This can happen even to **disciples**...

Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you so long, and yet you do not know me, Philip?"

John 14:9 (RSV)

It is possible! It is so possible that Jesus repeatedly taught about it and warned against it...

'We ate and drank in your presence, and you taught in our streets.'

But he will say, 'I tell you, I do not know where you come from...'

Luke 13:26-27 (RSV)

The younger son is lost because of his badness. But (look at your outline) **the older son is lost because of his goodness. Why? Goodness hides your need for God.**

Younger Brother Lostness...

There is **no hiding** for the younger brother. Everything he is and has is right out there, easy to see. He says to his Father, 'I am out of here. I don't need you or want you. Just give me my stuff and get out of my way. I am going to run my own life, and I don't need you to do it for me or tell me what is right and wrong.' No hiding that!

When his life falls apart, there's no hiding that, either. When he starts to think about it, **he thinks**... 'Whew, this isn't working out so well. Maybe I am not so smart. Maybe I really do need God, maybe I do need a fresh start, maybe I even need a whole new life." **Everyone around you says**, "Yeah, you really do!"

But Older Brother Lostness is Different...

Your lostness is **hidden** because of your **goodness**. He stays home, does it all right, and **everyone approves** of him. He **approves of himself**. So he **can't see** his lostness. He can't see what is killing him. And neither can the people around him. And what is killing him is **his pride**, his **self sufficiency**. All covered over very nicely by his goodness!

He doesn't think he needs a new life, he is convinced that he can manage life pretty well. He has this **pride**, "I am good. I have earned my place in this family. **The family owes me.**"

"When you use your goodness to demand your rights, you have missed the Father's heart." Tim Keller

And that gets him lost. Every time.

Let's take a closer look at 'Older Brother Lostness'... (outline)

Signs of 'Older Brother Lostness'...

- He Is **Angry** About His Life and **Withdrawn** From His Family

But he was angry and refused to go in.

Luke 15:28 (RSV)

When his world comes apart, he gets angry and he withdraws. That is how lost older brothers handle their problems. They get angry about their life. They **blame God**. And get angry at him. You **walk away** from him. And you get angry at other Christians. And you withdraw from them. You 'refuse to go in.' You stop fellowshiping and worshipping. It is a sign.

- He Has a **Judgmental** Heart

But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your living with harlots, you killed for him the fatted calf!

Luke 15:30 (RSV)

Lost older brothers look down on people, on lots of people. Especially lost younger brothers. Can't you just hear him talk about his younger brother, '**I would never do that**. Never.' In his heart, the older brother has **cut his younger brother out**. This 'son of yours' he calls him. His younger brother has been decimated by his rebellion, but the older brother can't see it, has no time for it. This younger brother is **gone**. And **he is glad**. It is another sign.

- He Has No Passion For **Christlikeness**

"Lo, these many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command..."

Luke 15:29 (RSV)

The RSV doesn't do the phrase justice. Better the NIV translation, 'All these years I have slaved for you, and I never disobeyed your orders...'

Think about the phrases. '*Slaved for you...*' '*Your orders...*' This older brother **hates his life**. He doesn't love his father. He sees his life as **slavery**. Obeying orders he hates.

Lost older brothers are **law keepers who are law haters**. They use the law to try and keep their own kingdom in place. They **haven't**

fallen in love with God. They don't have a passion for the **character of Christ** and the **holiness of Christ**. It is another sign.

- He Believes God **Owes Him**

"Lo, these many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command; yet you never gave me..."

Luke 15:29 (RSV)

'You have never given me what I deserve' is his conviction. It is his outlook on life. And so he is a victim. Deprived of what he has earned, of what should be coming his way. And so he is angry. But the truth is he is **just using God** to get his own way in life. You thought **God owed that to you**. You think life owes that to you. It is another sign. Your lostness is there, but it is hidden by your goodness. So you can't see it. And you think you have a right to be angry about life.

- He Can't **Celebrate** the return of a younger brother

"You never gave me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends."

Luke 15:29 (RSV)

"You never even gave me a goat" But he never asked for one! He never asked for a goat because **he has nothing to celebrate**. There is **no party in the heart** of the older son. They make terrible evangelists.

Ask a prodigal younger brother if they are a Christian, and before too long they will **start to dance**. Prodigal brothers never quite get over the fact that God has forgiven them. They are always celebrating. They make great evangelists.

What Is It That Pulls This Family Together?

- The Father Eagerly **Pursues** His Sons

But he was angry and refused to go in. His father came out and entreated him...

Luke 15:28 (RSV)

It wasn't the first time the father came out. He had been longing and looking for his youngest son for months upon months. And when that boy came home the father pounced on him. That's the way God's love is. He pounces!

But now another son was lost and once again, **the father goes out after him.** It will take that to bring this family together. But it will take more.

- The Father Willingly **Bears The Shame** Of His Sons
but he answered his father, 'Lo, these many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command; yet you never gave me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends.
 Luke 15:29 (RSV)

I want you to picture the scene to understand what the father had to bear. I imagine that all the father's family and servants and friends had been invited to this party. Word traveled fast, and people streamed in. Last to arrive outside the home was the older son. Again, word traveled fast. He was angry. He wouldn't come in. And everyone sees the father go out to him. Silence descends on the hall. Then, through the walls comes the voice of the angry brother...

'Lo, these many years I have slaved for you, and I never disobeyed your command; yet you never gave me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends.

All throughout the hall, heads hang. Many – most fathers gathered there would never bear the insult, the shame. But **this father is different. He bears the shame of his son's lostness willingly.** That is the heart of the Father. That is the heart of the Savior. Willingly he leaves his home, walks out of the feast to seek another lost son. Willingly he bears the shame and pays the price of our lostness. Willingly he carries it all the way to the cross. Willingly. **Why?**

- Because The Father's Home Is Built On **Grace**

*And he said to him, 'Son, you are always with me, and **all that is mine is yours.** It was fitting to make merry and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found.'*

Luke 15:31-32 (RSV)

That is the heart of the Father.

The stories end with a...

Question: Did the Older Brother Come in to the Party?

It is a question for us. Will we come into the party?

Pray with me...

Some of us here today are **lost older brothers**. You have an older brother heart, but it has been hard to see, hidden beneath your goodness. But deep down you are **mad** about your life. You think **God owes you**. You are always critical of other people. But you are not all that happy with who you have become. **Will you come into the party? You can. Today. "That's me, Lord. I'm coming in."**

Some of us here today are **lost younger brothers**.... It has been a long hard set of years. *'Whew, this isn't working out so well. Maybe I am not so smart. Maybe I really do need God, maybe I do need a fresh start, maybe I even need a whole new life.'* **"That's me, Lord. I'm coming home."**

All of us here today are being asked a fundamental question. Are we going to be about the gospel? Are we going to be friends of sinners. About the business of bringing God's grace to lost sons and daughters, near and far.

We need to get clear about this. Settle it with God right here today... 'Count me in, Lord. I'm on your gospel team. Use me. I will care about the people you care about. I want my life to be about your gospel.'