

Sermon: February 21, 2010

Scripture: Luke 15:11-14

Title: "Getting What's Yours" (Feeling the Pinch)

"There was once a man who had two sons; and the younger said to his father, "Father, give me my share of the property.".....

This parable speaks directly to the human situation. It is the human predicament that goes all the way back to Adam and Eve. It is the "me" syndrome and the "my" complex. We are not sure when it began with this young boy. At age five, did he look up at his brother who was older and taller and say to himself; "why does my brother get more than I do?" or did it begin when he was ten and his brother was fifteen and he saw that his brother got more privileges and he did not want to wait until he was fifteen to have his own camel and his own fancy robe? We don't know when the human spirit begins to differentiate itself as something unique from other beings and begins to demand its own place in the sun.

With some children it happens earlier than with others. And the truth is that unless someone: parents, society, teachers, ministers and others challenge the "me" in us and redirects our self understanding toward "others", you can end up with a rather myopic vision of the world that sees yourself as the center of creation and hub around which everything, including the Sun, revolves.

Our prisons are filled with examples of folks who never learned that the world does not revolve around them. And in some cases individuals are smart enough to manipulate their way through the childhood years and become successful in the business world only to discover that their tricks and schemes eventually catch up with them. Is this not the Bernie Madoff complex. In Mr. Madoff's world anything was acceptable if it served his egotistical world view. And even when it comes crashing down around him, he is unable to accept the responsibility for the destruction he has caused.

You and I are not very far from being just like this younger son. We want "ours" and we want it now. I know this feeling. I know what it is like to use credit cards to get what I want now, not fully understanding that those credit cards will have to be paid off. And I would suggest that it is a constant battle within each of us to claim our share of the good life. Perhaps this recent economic bust should serve to remind us that we can over extend our reach.

Would the story read any differently if it read something like this? *"A few days later the younger son turned the whole of his share into cash and left home for a distant country, where he set up a welfare program and invested his funds in a factory that hired over 100 out of work laborers."*

That sounds better does it not? We can excuse the younger son's demand for his part of the family wealth. But that is not how it reads. The story says that he "squandered his

wealth in reckless living.” It is simply another affirmation of how self centered this young man was. It was all about “him”. We all know people like this, do we not. Kids up at the high school are so perceptive. I was listening to four high school girls talking about one of their classmates. You could tell that they were pretty angry at her. One young girl said “Well it’s AAB,” with disgust in her voice. And all the girls giggled. They knew what it meant. “All about Becky!” Their errant friend’s name was Becky. And with that, they had characterized their friend. I wonder if Becky ever got the message. If it really was AAB, the chances are that Becky wouldn’t understand if the girls told her point blank.

Well, in our parable it was AAYB. All about younger brother. No one else counted.

Where would we be if, back in the time of John the Baptist, it had been AAJ. All about Jesus. When Jesus walked the dusty roads of Palestine it was anything but AAJ. Over and over again, Jesus instructs his disciples to not think of themselves as being so important. Turn the other cheek, go the extra mile. Blessed are the meek. If a man demands your coat, give him your cloak as well. One time he commanded his friends in his home town to tell no one about the healings and miracles he performed. Jesus did not claim the glory. We could go on and on with examples of how Jesus preached the Good News of God’s redeeming love and our response was to give ourselves totally to others.

As a matter of fact I honestly believe that in some ways we have made a cult out of Jesus, with Jesus stickers on our cars and WWJD wrist bands, and T-shirts with the profile of Jesus on them. I reject those pictures of Jesus, yes, even Solomon's Head of Christ. No one knows what Jesus looked like, and that's how it should be. I believe Jesus would turn over in his grave..... If he were in it..... but of course he isn't.

The self centered younger brother takes his share and spends it in wild living. And when the economy goes south, he finds himself in a pinch. Well, now we can really identify with the story. There is nothing like a good depression to shock us back to reality. What would it really take to bring us down to earth? Loose our jobs? Loose our homes? Loose our dignity? Loose our self respect? I believe the younger son lost it all. Next week we'll explore how low he could go.

But this week I simply want to leave you with this thought. How often do you claim your rightful place as if it was due you.... ? In what ways are our claims for what is ours in harmony with the Gospel of Sacrificial love which Christ came to share with us?

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