

Thanks, I Needed That! – March 6, 2016
By Wayne J. Schneider – Cum Santo Spiritu

Thanks, I needed That!
St. Luke 15:1-3 and 11b-32

Jesus' parable of the prodigal son is my favorite because it speaks to my spirit, it describes my tendencies, and it displays God's love so poignantly. If you spend time with this parable, you will discover that it is not a parable about sons, it is rather a story of a father's love.

This is not a parable of self-centered silliness; neither is it a story of rigid self-righteousness. The storyline is of the unceasing desire of a father's love, to transform two lost boys who are dead spiritually, and to restore their relationship with him.

Remembering the story's cultural setting, this son's action was rudeness of the first order. To ask for his inheritance before the father is dead is shameful. It brings shame not only on the son but also upon the father. In our vernacular, it is like saying "*Dad, why don't you just die!*" Talk about a slap in the face!

The neighborhood is shocked again when the father grants his son's request. The father had the power to refuse, to physically and emotionally abuse, to drive this scandalous puppy from the family . . . but he does not.

This son quickly runs to his neighbor and sells his livestock; then he sprints to Caldwell Banker and sells his land, boards the Queen Mary for foreign ports and foreign sports. And, regardless of culture or era, the money runs out too quickly. Need I add that this son does not spend his money on charity?

We are never told specifically how he spends his money, although his older brother assumes it was used for prostitutes. Personally, I think that was a bit of projection.

Any who, the son wakes up to find himself in deep do do. When the money runs out so do his 'friends.' He also discovers that there is a great famine in the land and no one is hiring, except pig farmers. Not such a good enterprise to place in your resume.

Finally, he has an epiphany, he awakens to himself. Its as though his foggy mind clears. He realizes that his father's servants eat better than he. A plan hatches. I'll return home, confess my sin, and admit my unworthiness as his son.

Have you ever wished you could go back, and stop before you said anything else? I have. This son should have!

But he goes on in his monologue. "I'll ask my father to just make me one of his servants." "CLANG! Thanks for playing! WRONG." A different translation for the word 'servant' is 'tradesman.' He has moved away from repentance toward another stupid life plan. It is an awkward plan to save his false self, his false pride, and then he'll go live with the boys in the bunkhouse. Not repentance, rather a new TV game show entitled, "Let's Negotiate!" Another slap in the face. More shameful than before.

But love never gives up. St. Paul writes, "*Now faith, hope, and love remain; and the greatest of these is love.*" The father waits and patience pays off. The heart of this story is the heart of the father. He finds who he is looking for because he is always looking and praying.

It is unseemly for an old man to run amok, robes wildly flapping. The father could care less. There is his son. Remember the culture? Even today in the Middle East, if you have shamed your father and returned home, your village people will greet you with insults and stones. This father runs to head off such action.

The son tries to speak but the father stops him. He will have none of the stupid plan. The father's surrounding arms quiet all nonsense. The father proclaims his love: "*You are my son. Always have been. Always will be. I love you.*" The son is forgiven before he confesses. Grace before confession. We make confession as a celebration of the forgiveness we already have.

But there is another son back at the ranch. He hears a celebration and wants to know what's going on. He learns his younger brother has returned. He goes ballistic and will not attend the party. Can you hear the older brother rant? "*This jerk wasted half the ranch and wants back in, probably to get at the other half. NOT GONNA HAPPEN!*"

He is such an anger-filled, self-filled, self-righteous numbers guy, that he cannot be happy for anyone. So, he stays away from the party and, (sound familiar?) shames his

father. If I were that father, I probably would ignore him. But, for yet another time, this father goes out and with great love, coaxes this son in.

So, with which son do you resonate? I think I find myself with both of them from time to time. It may be true that we waste our gifts, and then view ourselves as better than others. Whichever one we relate too, we can never escape the love of God in Christ Jesus. God's love will never let us go.

Thomas Howard wrote a wonderful book entitled, "Christ the Tiger." This is how I picture Jesus. Always pursuing us in Love. Who are you pursuing? Alleluia. Amen.