

## HEARTBEATS Staying Connected 10/6/2023

Dear Friends in CHRIST,

It never ceases to amaze me, and it is always a joy when I find a new twist or nuance in a passage from scripture that gives me a bit more insight into our amazing, loving GOD. One of the places that I often find new things is in my favorite parable of JESUS, “The Prodigal Son” in Luke 15. There are just so many twists and clues in this story that I sometimes wonder if I could preach on it for a year and never run out of different things to talk about.

Today, as I was reading the story again, I was struck by a small detail in the father’s fulfillment of the younger son’s request. We are told in verse 12 that, “The younger one [son] said to his father, ‘Father, give me my share of the estate.’ So, he divided his property between them.” Nothing really remarkable there, right? And if what happened in this verse was not included, you wouldn’t have the rest of story, right? So, we don’t think about it much. Or at all.

But consider the nuances, the shades, the tiny details of what is happening here. First of all, the son’s request, “Give me my share of the estate,” for the people in JESUS’ day was scandalous. It really is for our day, too, but we kind of miss it. When do you receive your share of your parent’s estate? When they die. So, the younger son is saying to his father, in essence, “Drop dead so I can have my money.” That’s not how children are supposed to behave toward their parents, especially in the culture of that day. People would have been shocked just by this second line of the parable. The son’s demand is a great sin against parent and, therefore, against GOD. Honor your father and mother. Not such an honorable statement from the son.

But that’s not what hit me today. I’ve known and talked about this action of the younger son before. What got me today was the father’s response: “So, he divided his property between them.” No questions asked. No challenge to the demand. No discussion about why he wanted the money, or what he was going to do with, or even and especially, why he was saying such a thing to his father. Dad just did it. He let him have the money. No questions asked.

Now we know that this story teaches us about GOD and GOD’S Kingdom. Parables give us a glimpse into the reality of who GOD is in relationship to us. They show us little details about GOD and often we miss them because we’re usually focused on who we are in the story. But it seems to me, that this little detail says a great deal about GOD and who GOD is in relationship to us.

We were created in the image of GOD, with the freedom to choose between good and evil, right and wrong, life and death. So, when the son asks for his inheritance, he is choosing to reject his father and his family and the traditions of his culture, and go his own way. He is choosing what he wants. And his father—GOD—lets him. It doesn’t mean that his father approves. It doesn’t mean that this is what his father wants. Nevertheless, his father, the one who, in a sense created him, allows him to make his own choice, and his father—GOD—honors that freedom of choice. He lets him go his own way.

The story is telling us that this is how GOD is. GOD honors the image in which GOD made us with the freedom to choose. GOD allows us to reject GOD and GOD’S good will for us and to go our own way. That’s just how GOD is. GOD doesn’t pull the strings in our lives like a puppet-master. GOD doesn’t stop us from making our own choices. GOD lets us go and then waits, hoping that we will

return. You see, that of course is what much of the rest of the story is about—GOD waiting for us to return. GOD always welcomes us when we come back. But I think it is important to recognize that GOD also lets us go. There are many today who consciously or unconsciously have said to GOD, “See you!” “Goodbye!” Even “Drop dead!” And GOD graciously lets us. Again, it isn’t what GOD wants. GOD wants all GOD’S children with GOD always. But GOD lets us go our own way, if that’s what we choose. And then GOD waits. And hopes. And if and when we return, GOD throws a party.

In CHRST'S love,  
Pastor Jeffrey