

3/18/2007

## SERMON: "LIVING LOVED"

Luke 15:1-3, 11-32

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### INTRODUCTION:

Listen to this explanation of Creation in terms of the food we eat.

*In the beginning, God created the Heavens and the Earth and populated the Earth with broccoli, cauliflower and spinach, green and yellow and red vegetables of all kinds, so Man and Woman would live long and healthy lives.*

*Then using God's great gifts, Satan created Ben and Jerry's Ice Cream and Krispy Kreme Donuts. And Satan said, "You want chocolate with that?"*

*And Man said, "Yes!" and Woman said, "And as long as you're at it, add some sprinkles." And they gained 10 pounds. And Satan smiled.*

*And God created the healthful yogurt that Woman might keep the figure that Man found so fair. And Satan brought forth white flour from the wheat, and sugar from the cane, and combined them. And Woman went from size 6 to size 14.*

*So God said, "Try my fresh green salad." And Satan presented Thousand-Island Dressing, buttery croutons and garlic toast on the side. And Man and Woman unfastened their belts following the repast.*

*God then said, "I have sent you heart healthy vegetables and olive oil in which to cook them." And Satan brought forth deep fried fish and chicken-fried steak so big it needed its own platter. And Man gained more weight and his cholesterol went through the roof.*

*God then created a light, fluffy white cake, and named it "Angel Food Cake," and said, "It is good." Satan then created chocolate cake and name it "Devil's Food."*

*God then brought forth running shoes so that His children might lose those extra pounds. And Satan gave cable TV with a remote control so Man would not have to toil changing the channels. And Man and*

*Woman laughed and cried before the flickering blue light and gained pounds.*

*Then God brought forth the potato, naturally low in fat and brimming with nutrition. And Satan peeled off the healthful skin and sliced the starchy center into chips and deep-fried them. And Man again gained pounds.*

*God then gave lean beef so that Man might consume fewer calories and still satisfy his appetite. And Satan created McDonald's and its 99-cent double cheeseburger. Then he said, "You want fries with that?" And Man replied, "Yes! And super size them!" And Satan said, "It is good." And Man went into cardiac arrest.*

*God sighed and created quadruple bypass surgery. Then Satan created HMOs.*

What we eat can reflect our experience of Love or the lack thereof. It may also reflect what is eating on us. There was a young man who found himself eating food that very much reflected the Love he had rejected and lost, and that food brought him to his senses. It got him started back on the path to the Love he so desperately needed. The Love every human being longs for and needs to live. The food this young man was about to eat – a corncob from the pigs' slop - food that has absolutely no nutritional value and taste very bitter.

Who is this young man?

He is the **Prodigal Son** used in a parable story by Christ.

We can identify with and learn from this young man as we ask ourselves –

**What are we feeding on?**

**and**

**What's feeding on us that keeps the Love from God that we need so much at a distance from us?**

Remember this phrase from the story Christ told: **When he came to his senses, he returned to the relationship of love.**

( ) **On the screen you see a copy of the painting by Rembrandt** that depicts the scene of the father welcoming the prodigal son home and expressing his unconditional love and compassion. There's much we can speak of from this wonderful parable story told by Christ. There's much we could point out from the painting itself. For example, notice how the artist painted the father's hands - one is very strong, depicting a masculine hand, and the other is rather smaller, more gentle, depicting a more feminine hand. As the father in the story stands

for the “*God figure*”, how wonderful that both attributes of God are present, **strength and nurturing**.

Or, we could focus on the figure to the right, the elder brother who appears to wish he could be in the place of blessing and receiving the love, but who just can't bring himself to that place. We might look at the shabby clothing of the younger brother, showing the wear of life on him from the misguided paths he had traveled – the environment in which he had been living.

*But today – I focus our attention on the Prodigal's struggle to discover and live in the unconditional love, for it is the same struggle you and I have in truly finding and living in that love that God offers to you (us).*

( ) **What do we do when we find ourselves in prodigal pants running in the wrong direction?** You might well ask: How could this young man go so far astray from the love and care offered him? A good question to ask ourselves also.

( ) **Often our problems are caused by wrong choices.** Clearly from the reception he received in his returning, the father running out to him, falling on him with compassion, the family ring, the new clothes, the feast, the celebration, this fellow was greatly loved, highly valued, and of great worth. How could he have missed seeing this before and go so far away from it? How could he go about taking his inheritance, spending it on material goods and wasting it all on people and things that de-valued him, and certainly were not loving of him? Using it all up on users and abusers until he had nothing?

( ) **Well here's a little insight for you, because you may well also be rejecting God's Unconditional Love for you by choosing to Survive rather than Thrive in that Love.**

You see, in this story, the father figure represents God. The unconditional love that is offered at the end of the story is the same love that was available to the prodigal at the beginning and in the middle of the story.

That's the love God offers you.

But in the family, as in life's relationships, **there are experiences and factors that tend to filter out, delete, distort, and cause us to generalize the unconditional into conditional love.** Early on, we learn what it takes to survive in life rather than to thrive in life. You see, living in and under unconditional love causes us to thrive, to grow with positive strength into our God-created purposes. But living under survival, thwarts, limits, and diminishes our growth and development.

## Survive or Thrive? Living Then. . . Living Now.

Which did you learn growing up?

Surviving      or       Thriving  
 Survival      or       Thrivation

Which are you living by now?

Unconsciously. . . Subconsciously

## The Prodigal Learned and Lived Survival. . .

### Conscious Unconditional Love Living = Thrivation

So how is it that this one could live in the presence of such unconditional love and come to reject it, believing that the love he longed for would be found out there, away from the source?

Remember the elder brother?

Just as we discover what was going on in the environment of this home, (what was coming from the father to the younger son), by hearing the end of the story, so we can discover some of what caused the young man to live in a survival mode rather than a thriving mode.

The elder brother's response at the end of the story reveals the elements in the environment that shaped the survival instinct in the younger brother. That response was one of anger, jealousy, and attack in the very presence of unconditional love being lavished on the one who had taken such a wicked path. So in this home environment there was the wonderful gift of unconditional love and the battle for supremacy, for rights, for blessing that did not believe that such love was available for all, only just for some. In that conflictive structure, the younger brother learned survival techniques that gradually lead him to believe that the only way to survive was to run away from the love and find it in persons and things outside of himself; persons and things that only offered conditional love.

Some might ask: But pastor what does this have to do with the story Christ was telling? **It is exactly the story Christ was telling.**

You see the context of the story was that Christ was sharing the unconditional love of God with persons whose lives were bankrupt (i.e. of doubtful reputations). And the Pharisees and religious scholars were not pleased. They growled: "He

takes in sinners and eats meals with them, treating them like old friends.” Their grumbling triggered this story.

And thus our story is introduced among stories of persons loving unconditionally and seeking to find the love that is lost. So in this context, Christ speaks of one who was loved dearly, whose environment had the presence of love, but also had the element of jealousy, de-valuation, degrading that produced **survival** living rather than **thriving** living.

How about you? Early on, did you learn to survive? and have you lived most of your life just getting along with whatever it takes? or have you discovered the wonderful life that is found in living in God’s powerful love? Are you leaving behind this wonderful, empowering love that God has for you? Have you let others teach you to merely survive?

***Don’t miss this*** – the whole problem of leaving behind, of rejecting the love offered, of losing sight of your personal worth, of seeking to find what you already have – in all the wrong places, all starts and ends with your senses. As in the story, the Prodigal “came to his senses,” so you and I need to engage our senses to help us get into the love. What senses? By that I mean the way, the process through which you understand, comprehend, and grasp reality – the reality of God’s Love.

In the middle of the story, when the Prodigal was about to eat a useless corncob, he came to his senses; he realized and understood what real love was and where to find it.

( ) **In a sense, love can weigh you down.** And in that very way, it can connect you to the foundation of real love, drawing you like a magnet, like gravity itself, back to the Source.

At the beginning of the story, this one’s senses lead him away from love. And at the end, in his returning, he experienced the love in reality.

That’s my goal for you today. That’s the purpose of this message.

Here, at the beginning, you’ve come in from an environment that’s filled with rejection. You’ve come here to this environment where the unconditional love of God is being presented to your senses and your sense process system. This truth of God’s amazing love comes to you from and through your environment; through your surroundings – all the conditions, circumstances, and influences that surround you. And you have filters that translate that love message so that you can make sense of it. That sense is your present reality. It has been shaped by the elements of your environment that compete for love, that believe only some deserve the love, that want the love for themselves, and not for you.

Seeking to survive in that environment, buying into its false realities, you struggle in your senses, finding God's unconditional love to be illusive.

**( ) So here's the Big Question: Are your filters limiting the Powerful Life-Changing Reality that God's Love Provides?**

You see, you live your life based on what your filters are letting through. Like the Prodigal, you are making choices based on what your filters are letting through. I want to help you look at your filters for a moment so that you can have a greater reality. God is constantly coming to you with this message of unconditional love. But are you experiencing the reality of that? **Are you living in and out of unconditional love?**

**( ) Take a look at your filter system through which you seek to make sense of this message. (see slide)**

You take in input from your environment (surroundings, experiences, circumstances) through your filters and these filters delete, distort, and generalize that love. The Prodigal did that. The environment that he left at the beginning of the story was the same one to which he returned. It hadn't changed, his way of seeing (sensing) it, had. You see, at the beginning his filters translated reality differently.

Language – At the beginning his language saw and spoke of love as getting what was his before he was ready, prepared, mature enough to use it. "Give me what is mine now!" His words are words of impatience and impulsion. I'm in control, I want it all and I want it now. The unconditional loving father gave it to him. But his language lacks the maturity needed to speak and act in wisdom, so the Prodigal wastes it all.

A second filter you use are your memories. Unhealed memories of hurt, anger, fear, these memories also distort and cause us to generalize our sense of love and change our reality. Memories of rejection, of not being equal with or to another (big brother), Memories of conditional love experiences and survival techniques that got us through them. . . these memories distort love.

Decision Filters are our choice filters. We choose to what and who we will give ourselves, our time, our energies, resources. We often choose to give these to people and things who are users and abusers; to those who have an ever increasing inability to satisfy. The Prodigal saw love as being able to give away everything to others, to buy love, to live life without accountability as if the cost of such didn't matter. Love means not accountability. Live for the moment.

His Belief Filters sensed out the reality that for love to truly exist, there is both mutuality and responsibility for ones actions and there is the need for commitment.

His **Value Filters** distorted his sense of what he had and what he was giving up. His **Attitude** said, life is mine, I'll sow what I want with it.

His **Ways of Sorting Information** was controlled by immediate gratification, distorted by the tyranny of the immediate, with no regard for the powerful grace that life lived in God's love brings:

- ▶ Grace to endure
- ▶ Patience to wait for what is better
- ▶ Peace to go through the immediate to gain and keep what is of greater value.

*When we live in God's love, grace, patience, and peace are part of what helps us to thrive.*

The Prodigal's **Strategies Filters** were so off that as he sat in the pig pen and began to strategize how he could get out of the mess he was in, he believed he was no longer worthy to be the child and not worthy to receive the love of the one who had given him life along with everything he needed.

How about you?

As you are daily making your plans, your strategies of what you will do, how you'll get out of the mess life has become, do you see yourself as unworthy? When you do, you take on the very self view of those who would keep you from knowing God's love.

**Well, the reality is, you are worthy.** Just as the Prodigal son discovered when he returned home and began his repentance, God can receive that "I've sinned against God and before you," but doesn't want to hear "I'm not worthy." The father and God interrupt such words, and lavish love, celebration, the giving of renewed life, and new dressings for new living.

### **( ) God Loves You**

So as you come to your senses, as you bring your filters into the reality of God's unconditional love, if you're feeling unworthy, know that God doesn't feel that, because you are made worthy in Christ. You are God's created being, fully loved. Let this message break through all your filters into your true reality.

### **Accept God's love.**

Don't let your own: Language  
Decisions  
Beliefs  
Values  
Attitudes  
Ways of Sorting  
or

Strategies delete, distort, or generalize away this

Absolute, Wonderful and Amazing Reality:

**GOD LOVES YOU!**

Bring your senses under that love –

Return –

Believe –

Receive

--Pastor Ike