

PASTOR'S MESSAGE

At this time of year I always think about my father because it is close to his birthday. I loved him, and he was good to us children and left us with many good memories. If I ever asked him for my share of the inheritance, he would look at me and laugh! Who in their right mind would give half of what they owned to their son or daughter if one of them asked for it? Would you? Usually a person receives their inheritance when the parents die, and not before.

The gospel story of the Prodigal Son describes the father giving his son the inheritance while he was still alive. The son departs with the money and squanders it away on reckless living. To me, the father is not being smart, and is just as foolish as the son. Although we may not give away our inheritance while we are alive, that is not the way of God. Actions we may regard as foolish are wise in God's eyes. God's love is far greater than any human love. It was only when the son had spent and lost everything he owned that he repented of his sins and regained his senses. The son had enough courage and good sense to return home to his father, ask for forgiveness and receive a surprising warm welcome.

What about the forgotten son, the one who stayed home, was obedient and never got into any kind of trouble? Nice child to have around, but sounds to me like he was boring! This son was jealous and angry toward his wayward brother and upset with his father. How could his father throw a party and be overjoyed with a son who spent everything given to him. The father should have punished his wayward son and refused to take him back. This is how many of us would react if that occurred in our family. If we confess that each one of us is precious in God's eyes, how much more should we see that value in each other? The obedient son just didn't get it when his father said, "Your brother was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found". Sometimes the church tends to forget that we are to celebrate and welcome the lost, the sinner, the people for whom Jesus Christ died to save.

How do you react when a member of our parish leaves us for some time and decides to come back? Do we question their decisions? What about the stranger who has no church affiliation, but is looking for a faith community? Is there anger over long-absent members who do not support the church, but call on it in their time of need? Do the faithful resent those who only come at Christmas and Easter?

Maybe we see ourselves as the wayward son or the jealous brother who never caused any trouble. What about the loving father who is always there to care and love no matter what his children do? The church is to be the expression of God's love and grace. We are to extend forgiveness and welcome anyone who dares set foot within our building.

This season of Lent provides us with an opportunity to welcome and allow God's love to direct our lives.

See you in church!

Your Pastor Jukka