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Pastor:
Rev. Dr. William C. Weaver
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Sunday, March 14, 2010

Sermon Texts: Joshua 5: 9-12
Luke 15: 11-32
II Corinthians 5: 16-21

Sermon Title: "Sinners: Before and After"

Sermon Topic: Repentance and the Father's Acceptance

Sermon Purpose:

- 1) To teach that all is not lost, once you have forsaken God. Repentance means restoration.
- 2) To teach that restored and redeemed sinners have as many rights and privileges as those who never left the fold and they are to be treated as such.
- 3) To teach that repentance must be now. You may not have time, later.

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Sermon Prayer: Lord, empower my feeble words by your Holy Spirit to touch the lives of those who need your grace. In Jesus' name, I pray. Amen.

According to church tradition, this is "Refreshment Sunday." All during Lent you've been called upon to search yourselves and to repent. This Sunday is a time to realize why that's necessary.

Most of us have heard the story of the Prodigal Son so often we can recite it forward, backward, and sideways. We grew up having it told to us as a bedtime story, as a lesson in Vacation Bible School, in Sunday Church School, and from the pulpit during worship. We know all about the boy who took what he could, lived it up until the financial well ran dry, and then came home.

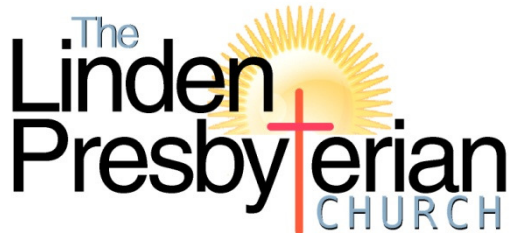
We're comfortable with it because we know it so well, and nothing that's said from the pulpit can make us uneasy about this lesson, anymore. So, we sit back and relax to the point we could even fall asleep, if the pastor didn't walk up and down the aisle making me too nervous to sleep. If we **did** fall asleep thinking about this story, we'd still feel wonderful because we know everything the pastor's going to say. We don't have to worry about him mentioning adultery, sexual promiscuity, alternate lifestyles, domestic violence, drug abuse, profaning the Sabbath, or anything else that could make us a little squeamish in our seats. We don't have to sit on the edge of our seat, ready for "fight or flight," because he's hitting too close to where we live. This is "Refreshment Sunday!"

Well, I'm telling you right now, "Don't get too comfortable!" **One** type of refreshment doesn't come until after you repent and confess your wrongdoing, and the **other** type of refreshment doesn't come until after the **benediction**.

Sin is sin, and it's found in this story. There is also love; a love that can be understood, and love that is questioned.

Here's a young man who knows full-well that when his father dies he and his brother will inherit all the rich farmland, and the livestock, and the bank accounts, and all the honor and influence that goes with his father's estate. He has lived well under his father's roof. There was always plenty of fine





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food and clothing. The servants respected him as much as they did his father.

Yes, he was asked to go out into the fields, now and again. But, that was usually to check on the progress being made. It was seldom that he was asked to do physical labor. But, that wasn't good enough. This fellow always wanted more!

Like so many young people, he decided he wanted his inheritance **before** his father died. He wasn't willing to wait until his father had no more use for it, and not caring that his father and brother might suffer because of his actions, he wanted his inheritance, now! He wanted to have a good time before he was too old to enjoy himself.

Well, he did! He spent all that he had in one big orgy of wine, women, and waywardness.

Just like the manna from heaven for the people of the Exodus; when sin stepped in, God's blessings stepped out. Just like when the people of Israel became greedy with the manna and God stopped its daily delivery, when this greedy young man started living like one who put the way of the world ahead of the way of God, suddenly his father's money ran out. If he was going to live like that, he was going to have to make it on his own.

Well, he quickly discovered the way of the world is a hard when you don't have any money. He tried! Oh, yes, he tried! But, he wasn't skilled at labor since he had done little more than loaf (when he was at home). Obviously, he couldn't manage his own funds, so no one was going to trust him to manage theirs. He wasn't well educated. He wasn't politically adept. He wasn't a candidate for anything, so he was given a job feeding pigs. But, even that was not enough. He was still starving.

So, he went back to his father's house, ready to confess his sin and ask – not for total forgiveness, but – to be hired as a servant.

When his father saw him coming, he ran to meet him and he embraced him with love. He received the young man back into his house as his son; with all the wealth and honor that was due a son of this man.

Now, let's just stop there, for a moment, and think how this applies to us, today.

First of all, we know that the father is God: our heavenly Father.

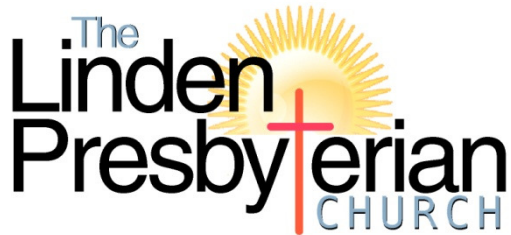
We are the prodigals. We have stopped living according to the will of our Father and we have started living according to the way of the land. You say, "Prove it!" Okay, I will.

Many of us have forgotten that the chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy him forever. This means we have a duty to worship God and to serve the church of Jesus Christ. We have 147 members of LPC. Allowing for those 30 who are ill, shut-ins, or now living out of the area, we should still have over 100 people sitting in this sanctuary.

Yet, many of us have found it more convenient to devote our lives to clubbing, drinking, or some sport (or other activity) that evaporates the paycheck that's meant to put food on the table and keep the bill collectors from the door. Recreation is fine, if done moderately. It's even legal.

But, all those activities – and others like them – are an abomination when any (or all) of them **take the place of worship!** When you start putting these things ahead of your responsibilities to God, that's when your life "goes south," because that's when the well runs dry. Just like the fellow in the





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Now, what about the rest of the story? What about the brother who was angered by his father's show of affection for his wayward sibling?

The rest of us are like him. We can't accept a repentant sinner into our midst because that person isn't as good as we are. We've been so good all along!

We've been here and worshipped and served. And, now, the God we've loved and obeyed has the audacity to forgive those bums and prostitutes, accepting them into his heavenly kingdom; expecting us to go in and sit at the same table with them; and accept the same Sacrament of Holy Communion! How can that be? It should burn in their mouths! And, if we get close enough, it would probably singe **our** clothing, too!

Remember the father said, "Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. It was fitting to make merry and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost and is found."

Behold, the old has passed away, the new has come."

"So, " you say, "what's to keep a person from living a life of evil and debauchery all along; and then, by repenting at the last minute, receive salvation?

My answer to you is that there's nothing to prevent it; and that it's fine (if that's what happens) because at least the person had the chance to repent and be saved. It's alright because, guess what? It's **God's** decision, not ours.

But, let me ask you something. Who knows exactly when that last trumpet will sound and when the Lord will return? Who of us has the power to determine at what hour we are going to die, so we can make amends at ten minutes before that hour?

Let me tell you a quick story. I once knew a young man in college who attempted suicide. He put a gun in his mouth, pulled the trigger, and **missed**. He blew away the side of his face and permanently disfigured himself, but he didn't die. (We cannot always determine when we will die, even under **those** circumstances.)

"So we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We beseech you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to know no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."

Which type of sinner are you: the before or the after, the prodigal or the brother?

Let us pray:

We thank you, heavenly Father, for your mercy that reaches out, for your patience that waits for our returning, and for your love that is ever ready to welcome sinners. We praise you that in Jesus Christ you came to us with forgiveness, and that – by your Holy Spirit – you move us to repent and to receive your love. Though we are sinners, you are faithful and worthy of all praise. We praise you, great God, in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

