

Our Wilderness Journey
The Wilderness We Create Arrogance
March 14, 2010

(Luke 15:1-3, 11b-32 NRSV) Now all the tax collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to him. {2} And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, "This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them." {3} So he told them this parable: {11} "There was a man who had two sons. {12} The younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of the property that will belong to me.' So he divided his property between them. {13} A few days later the younger son gathered all he had and traveled to a distant country, and there he squandered his property in dissolute living. {14} When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that country, and he began to be in need. {15} So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs. {16} He would gladly have filled himself with the pods that the pigs were eating; and no one gave him anything. {17} But when he came to himself he said, 'How many of my father's hired hands have bread enough and to spare, but here I am dying of hunger! {18} I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; {19} I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands.'" {20} So he set off and went to his father. But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him. {21} Then the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' {22} But the father said to his slaves, 'Quickly, bring out a robe--the best one--and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. {23} And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; {24} for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!' And they began to celebrate. {25} "Now his elder son was in the field; and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. {26} He called one of the slaves and asked what was going on. {27} He replied, 'Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has got him back safe and sound.' {28} Then he became angry and refused to go in. His father came out and began to plead with him. {29} But he answered his father, 'Listen! For all these years I have been working like a slave for you, and I have never disobeyed your command; yet you have never given me even a young goat so that I might celebrate with my friends. {30} But when this son of yours came back, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fatted calf for him!' {31} Then the father said to him, 'Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. {32} But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found.'"

Our story this morning is one of those stories that most of us have heard --- but not just heard --- have connected with one of the characters in the story.

How we plug into the story, depends on where we are at the time.

Sometimes we are the younger son

Sometimes we are the Father

Sometimes we are the elder son

But regardless of which character we connect with, most of us have connected with one or more of these characters over the years.

Our story begins with the younger son going to his father and saying to him: "Give me what is mine!"

The interesting thing, of course, is that nothing was his → at least not until his father dies

So what he was basically saying to his dad --- I wish you were dead

The father, however is gracious and gives his son what he wants → his portion of the estate

He takes the money and he heads off to Las Vegas (or at least the boats)

Blows the money on Wine, Women and Gambling

Just at the same time a recession hits the country and he is broke and he cannot find a job

Finally he finds a job working on a farm

Slopping pigs

Can you imagine the shame in what he was doing

A Jew slopping pigs?

Leviticus tells Jews that they are not to eat pork – but here he is taking care of them

But the story wants us to know that this man has fallen as far as he can fall

And while he is doing this terrible job, he realizes what he has done and decides to swallow his pride and go home.

While he is still a long way off, his father sees him and is overcome with compassion

Runs out to him and embraces him

But more than that → he gives him robe, ring and sandals

But the interesting question is: Where did the father get the items to give to his wayward son?

He had divided his property among his two sons, so he was taking something that he had given to the elder brother to now give to the younger son.

You can imagine how the elder brother felt.

His worthless younger brother returns and is treated like a king

And as a result → the older brother begins to sulk and create his own wilderness.

Most of us have been there.

We have gotten the attitude of entitlement that the younger brother developed and begin to believe that the world owes us.

Give me what is mine
I can do it myself
I don't need God or anybody else to help me

And when we do that --- we head into the wilderness
Wandering away from the path that God wants us to follow

And why do we get this kind of attitude?

The reality is, we teach our kids to be independent, and we see that independence as a good thing

But when we start developing this kind of idea we start chasing after the wrong things

The world promises us glitter and glamour

And so we begin to chase it → sometimes taking short cuts to try to find it.

We want to be loved – we want to belong
And we chase after it

But when we think we can have it on our own
When we think we don't need others
When we think the rules don't apply to us
When we think we don't need God
We get ourselves into trouble
And find ourselves in the wilderness

But we think the grass is greener if we can just get over . . . there

But when we arrive, we find out that the dream that we thought we were chasing was really a nightmare

And if we are lucky
If we are willing to swallow our arrogance and pride
We can begin to see what it was that we left behind

And we can begin to long for home

The road home often isn't easy

But the good news --- and the point of this parable is that we can come home again.

We can come out of the wilderness and experience the love that we so desperately need

The sad part about this is – this is a wilderness that we have created ourselves

We create this wilderness through our:

Arrogance

Greed

Self-centeredness

Thought that we are the center of the world and we don't need God

What wilderness have you created?

Are there places that you separated yourself from God and the community?

Think of those places

Write them down if that will help you - - -

And give them to God.

Only when you admit to the wilderness that you create, can you begin to crawl out of them and into the loving embrace of your God.