

September 15, 2019
Twenty-Fourth Sunday of Ordinary Time

Two of my three brothers, Brian and Bruce, are only 15 months apart. By the time they were three and four years old they were about the same size so it was just easier for my Mom to buy the same clothes for them. They looked a lot alike and so people often thought that they were twins. That is where the similarities ended. Brian, the older of the two was a shy and sensitive child. All Dad had to do was to frown at Brian and he would burst into tears. Bruce was more of a ruff and tumble sort of kid and Dad had to discipline Bruce in a different way than Brian. Sometimes Bruce would say after what Dad thought was a strict discipline, "That doesn't bother me." Then Dad discovered Bruce's weak spot, his Tonka truck. When dad took his Tonka Truck away, then Bruce begged for mercy.

My two brothers of mine are as different from each other as were the two brothers in the Gospel of Luke. The younger brother, was like Bruce, a risk-taker, pushing the limits, a ruff and tumble sort of guy. Take the inheritance and run! The older brother was sort of like my brother, Brian. Responsible, would do almost anything to please Dad, even work like a slave. The parable of the two brothers is how Jesus responds to the Pharisees and scribes who are strict about the law and stingy with forgiveness and who are complain that Jesus welcomes sinners and eats with them.

As different as the two brothers are from one another, here is how they are the same. They both forget that they are sons to the father. The younger son does more than forget; he even negates his relationship to his father. He essentially says to his father that he cares more about money than his relationship with his father. To take the inheritance before his father had died was as good as saying, "I don't care if you are dead or alive, I just want my money." The older son too has forgotten his relationship as a son to his father. He is working so hard that the servant knows more about what is going on in his own home as than what he does. He has to ask what the music and dancing is all about. Why was he working so hard in the field, so far from the home that he lost touch with his Father? Could it have been that he too was obsessed with money, just in a more "respectable" way than his younger brother does? Clearly, he is just as alienated from the father.

The father seems to care little if at all about two his sons' behavior. He seems to focus only on re-establishing his relationship with both of them as sons to their father and brothers to each other.

The case of the younger brother, the father completely ignores his sons' speech that he no longer deserves to be called his son, treat me as you would on of your servants. Instead he clothes him in royal garments and throws a party in celebration

The older son says when he explodes in anger with his father, "when your son returns who swallowed up your property" he is talking like a slave who thinks that nothing belongs to him, not the property, not even his brother. The father reassures him when he says that, "everything I have is yours. . . . your brother was dead and has come back to life."

It is hard for us to fully appreciate just how much change this parable demanded of the scribes and Pharisees, to completely change their understanding of God as the rule maker and it was their task to know that law of God and then to keep it. This is the beginning, but it is far from the end. The danger is that when we focus only on the law the is that we can think of ourselves as more as servants or even slaves of God rather than that we are daughters or sons of God. We are servants of God because out of love and mercy God has adopted us, has called us by name to be members of his own family. The founding pastor of St. Jude's Parish in Redmond, who went to his reward almost four years ago, used to say, "God is crazy in love with us." We see the crazy love of God in the parables today. God calls us to show his crazy love in the way love and forgive each other. To love and forgive generously when the only reason to do so is because has first loved and forgiven us with incredible generosity.