

## "Christ(mas) for All"

December 25, 2016



Last night, I spoke of Jesus Christ as the greatest gift we will ever be given. I truly believe this with all of my heart, soul, mind, and strength. There is no greater gift anyone could ever be given than the gift of a personal relationship with Jesus Christ that leads to both eternal life and to peace and contentment in this life. Jesus carries us through the trials and celebrates with us in the joys and victories. He is there through it all. For this great gift we again say, thanks be to God. Let us pray.

What is our response to this wonderful gift? Our basic response should be to live our lives honoring the two great commandments – love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength and love neighbor as self. For most Christians, this is definitely our intent. This is our goal. But, when we are honest, it is not always our reality. We find our story in today's scripture passage.

*<sup>11</sup> Jesus also told them another story: Once a man had two sons. <sup>12</sup> The younger son said to his father, "Give me my share of the property." So the father divided his property between his two sons. <sup>13</sup> Not long after that, the younger son packed up everything he owned and left for a foreign country, where he wasted all his money in wild living. <sup>14</sup> He had spent everything, when a bad famine spread through that whole land. Soon he had nothing to eat.*



*15 He went to work for a man in that country, and the man sent him out to take care of his pigs. 16 He would have been glad to eat what the pigs were eating, but no one gave him a thing.*



Can you relate to this younger son in this familiar parable? Or does it maybe remind you of a season in your life? It reminds me of times in my life. But this parable also reminds me of the great love of God, the love that knows I will stumble and fail, the love that accepts my repentance, the love that takes me back, and the love that makes me new again. But not just one more time. This too is a great gift: one more time. Even as we grow in our faith, we have temptation and we stumble into sin. Maybe we do not venture to distant lands, but we venture to dark places, to secret spaces. The fact is we all sin.



*17 Finally, he came to his senses and said, "My father's workers have plenty to eat, and here I am, starving to death! 18 I will go to my father and say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against God in heaven and against you. 19 I am no longer good enough to be called your son. Treat me like one of your workers.'"*



When we come to God, knowing we have sinned, knowing we have done wrong, what is God's response? One more time. God says, "Welcome back, one more time, my child, my love. Welcome back." In these next verses, we really get a great image of God's love for us through the actions of the father in the parable.



*<sup>20</sup> The younger son got up and started back to his father. But when he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt sorry for him. He ran to his son and hugged and kissed him.*

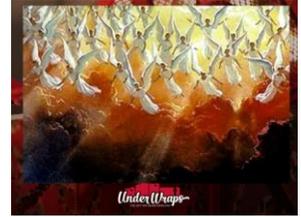


Can you picture God doing this? I don't have any trouble at all seeing God running to meet us. No trouble at all. Do you? He ran to his son, he hugged and kissed him.

Last Sunday afternoon, I shared with the ninth grade confirmation class how I see part of heaven. I base it on the parable of the lost sheep. You remember the story – a sheep wanders off and the shepherd leaves the ninety-nine and goes off to find that one lost sheep. In Luke 15:7, the parable concludes with Jesus saying, *"I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance."*

A couple of Sundays ago we talked about the cosmic battle that goes on in the spiritual realms between the forces of good and evil. So in my mind, I see angels gathered around in groups up in heaven, watching us down here on

earth. I see them “ooohhh” and “aaawww” as we waver between living as God intends us to live and living in sin. I imagine the angels getting up to the edge of their clouds as we begin to do something right, ready to burst into cheers. In my mind’s eye it looks something like this picture. I envision them slapping their leg and walking away a bit when we slip up, letting out a little sigh. Our life seems like a constant roller-coaster – often living according to God’s will, but sometimes falling to our temptations.



We try to live to please God, to honor God’s intent for our lives. But sometimes we find ourselves in the depth of our sin or we get stuck in the guilt or shame. In times like this, it is hard to give the angels an opportunity to cheer. We just cannot take that step to break free from our sin or to come to God seeking forgiveness. We hesitate. In our story from Luke, we have hope, again in the father’s response to the son.



*<sup>21</sup> The son said, "Father, I have sinned against God in heaven and against you. I am no longer good enough to be called your son." <sup>22</sup> But his father said to the servants, "Hurry and bring the best clothes and put them on him. Give him a ring for his finger and sandals for his feet. <sup>23</sup> Get the best calf and prepare it, so we can eat and celebrate. <sup>24</sup> This son of mine was dead, but has now come back to life. He was lost and has now been found." And they began to celebrate.*



Like the son with his earthly father, we cannot ever say we are not good enough for our heavenly Father. We can never say we are not a child of God. We may think it. We may even feel like it. But God will say, "Hurry, come back into my presence. Wash away those stains and be white as snow. Come, partake of the feast of my blessings." Then the angels will rejoice and all of heaven will begin to celebrate, for what was lost has been found.

This is the gift of Christmas. Jesus was born in a humble manger. He lived life as God's love in the world. He died as a king on the cross, bearing the sin of the world, the sin of you and me. For this great gift, we say thanks be to God. Amen.