

Allen Pruitt

This story has, for centuries,  
    been called “the gospel in the gospel.”  
This story that Jesus told;  
this story of a father and his two sons.  
    The good news in the good news.

If I could preach one sermon only,  
    one sermon for the rest of my life,  
        it would not be a sermon,  
            but simply to read this story and say, “Amen.”

    The good news in the good news,  
and that news is this:  
    you are loved.  
    You.  
    Are.  
    Loved.  
No matter what.  
    You are loved.

There was a man who had two sons.  
    The younger son did many terrible things.  
        And he brought shame and dishonor to his family.  
Not only did he do terrible, shameful things,  
    but he did those things TO his family.

“Give me the share of the property that will be mine.”  
He might as well say,  
    “I wish you were already dead old man.”

And what does he spend his share on,  
this younger son,  
after liquidating 1/3 of the family farm?  
Did he try to strike it rich?  
Was he trying to outdo his older brother or his father?  
No.  
He squandered it all.  
Wasted on riotous living.  
Dissolute living.

Which does mean every bad thing you can imagine it does.

And then the money is gone.  
The money disappears,  
as money always does.  
The money is gone  
and with it the temporary friends the younger son most likely had.

All of it is gone,  
and he's left working an awful job.  
But to be clear,  
this is not the kind of story we're supposed to like.  
This is not some sort of American chimera  
of falling down  
and getting back up by your bootstraps.

This is a boy in ancient Palestine,  
a Jewish boy,  
who had it all,  
now feeding the pigs,  
not only that,  
but dying to eat with them too.

He has hit bottom.  
And so decides to head back to daddy.

“I will get up and go to my father,  
and I will say to him,  
    “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you;  
    I am no longer worthy to be called your son;  
    treat me like one of your hired hands.”

Who knows if he meant it.  
    Could have been another ploy.  
You’d say anything to avoid eating warmed over pig slop.  
    Maybe he meant it,  
    maybe he didn’t.

Turns out,  
    it never mattered whether he meant it or not.

    “But while he was still far off,  
    his father saw him  
        and was filled with compassion;  
    he ran and put his arms around (his son)  
    and kissed him.”

Apology,  
    false or not;  
repentance,  
    heartfelt or not,  
    never had a chance to happen.

His father dashes out the door.

This is not a young man.  
He’s not wearing a track suit.  
    This father has gathered up his robe,  
    and is running like a crazy person out the door,  
    up the driveway,  
    and down the road.

The father comes and meets the sinful son,  
    right where he is.

We call this the Parable of the Prodigal Son.

But I vote that we change it.

Just call it the Parable of the Prodigals.

The younger son is wasteful,  
extravagant with the way he lives.

He turns love into possession

and possessions into the kind of life that isn't really living.

And he finds himself at the bottom of the heap.

And the father is just as prodigal,

just as wasteful,

just as extravagant.

He's had his chances,

all along the way:

first off:

tell the boy no,

when he does come back,

make him ask for forgiveness,

make him earn his way back into the family.

But no,

the father spends the family honor,

and 1/3 of the family money,

all on this boy,

this self-centered boy.

And whatever honor the father has retained,

he spends it now,

here at the end,

running down the road to meet the boy,

and then...throwing a big party

to celebrate the scoundrel's return.

I cannot begin to explain how disgusting this story would have been  
to the people who heard Jesus tell it.

They would have been shocked, horrified.

It's almost as if Jesus were saying this,

*"There is absolutely nothing you can do  
to make God stop loving you."*

It's almost like

Jesus wants us to believe that.

The boy tried to say his apology.

He did.

Whether he meant it or not,  
the boy tried.

"The son said, 'Father I have sinned;

I am no longer worthy to be your son.'

But the father never responded to that apology,  
he breezed right over that,

instead saying to his slaves...

'This is MY SON!

Bring a robe - the best one -

and a ring

and some shoes for his feet.

And then,

you get the fatted calf

and we will eat and celebrate;

for this son of mine was dead

and is alive again;

he was lost and is found!"

And they began to celebrate.

There was a man who had two sons.

Oh, that's right.  
Whatever happened to that other son?  
We only hear tell of him,  
until right here at the end of the story.

“Now his elder son was in the field.”  
Dutiful,  
obedient.  
Here he is working,  
when he hears music and dancing.

“He called one of the slaves and asked what was going on.  
- ‘Your brother has come,  
and your father has killed the fatted calf,  
because he has got him back safe and sound.’

Then he became angry and refused to go in.”

Oh.  
That's what happened to that other son.  
“He became angry and refused to go in.”

Where are **you** right now?

Where are you?

Are you wearing the robe and the ring,  
partying like you were dead and are alive again?

Or are you angry,  
and standing outside  
to make sure everybody knows it?

**Not** who are you always?

**Not** who do you wish you were?

Just, where are you right now?

Hearing this story at 10:54 on a Sunday morning?

They are prodigal,  
every one of them.

That younger son spent money with reckless abandon,  
that father poured love out like it was water in a bathtub,  
and this eldest son,

he seems prodigal of his anger,  
of his resentment.

Because when you are angry,  
there won't ever be enough.

You can never be angry enough  
to cover all the hurts and wrongs that have been done to you.

Eventually you'll run out of anger,  
and you'll just be standing outside the party,  
as dead as the fatted calf  
- and not half as much use.

And you'll run out of money.  
We all know that.  
And it's clear in the story too.  
Money comes and money goes,  
no matter how you obtain it.

But you'll never run out of grace,  
of mercy,  
forgiveness,  
or love.  
No matter how much you waste it,  
pour it out,  
or spend it on people who don't deserve it.

You just can't ever run out.

"All that is mine is yours.  
But we had to celebrate and rejoice."  
"All that is mine is yours.  
Except the fatted calf.  
Except he never even gave him a young goat.

But there is one thing that father did for **both** of his boys.  
One way he loved them both, just the same.

When that good for nothing boy was still far off,  
the father ran out the door to meet him.  
And when that goody two shoes brother of his  
was standing lonely outside the party,  
the father walked the door to meet him.

He meets him,  
right where he is.



We are prodigal, every one of us.

It's almost as if Jesus were saying this,  
"There is absolutely nothing you can do  
to make God stop loving you."

It's almost like Jesus wants us to believe that.

The good news in the good news,  
and that news is this:

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You.

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No matter what.

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