

Sermon for March 27, 2022

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But while he was still far off, his father saw him...

Author and researcher Brene Brown writes “Never underestimate the power of being seen.” Seen for who you really are, in all of your fullness.

This boy, this Prodigal son, demanded an inheritance from a parent who was not yet dead. He abandoned his family and the work of the fields to travel and play. He has squandered all he has been given, living in ways that many would have disapproved of, found immoral. Having failed to make wise decisions, he must beg, accepting whatever offers will provide him food in his starvation. He has groveled among the pigs. He has prepared a confession “Father I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy.”

But before he can take the steps necessary to return home, before he can speak the words pleading for forgiveness, the Father acts.

But while he was still far off, his father saw him...

His father saw him – for who he really was, in all his fullness. Most certainly his father saw the boy who had demanded a portion of his life’s work. He saw the boy who had abandoned his family, leaving them without word. He saw the boy who had not continued to work the fields and support the family trade. He must have been able to see the current condition of the boy who slumped his way down the road toward home to plead for work as a hired hand. The father could see the boy returned with nothing, dirty from his life with the pigs, tear stained and broken. And while the boy saw in himself a sinner, an unworthy individual - the father saw more. The Father saw his son – who was presumed dead and is alive, who was lost and now is found. The Father sees his beloved child.

Seeing all this child in his fullness, the father is filled with compassion and runs and puts his arms around him and kisses him. He announces to everyone, “celebrate, rejoice – this son of mine – dead and alive, lost and now found.”

And with eyes wide open to all that his son has been and done, is and may be - sinner and forgiven, unworthy and beloved - seeing his son in this fullness, the father acts with extravagance once again – “bring out a robe, the best one, put it on him, put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet, get the fatted calf and let’s eat.”

While he was still far off, his father saw him...

And this is not the only one this father sees. As the celebration begins, the older son, still working in the field, hears the celebration. Hearing from one of the servants that his prodigal brother has returned and been embraced in his father’s extravagant love, he becomes angry and refuses to go in.

His father sees him. And while this older boy stands with stubborn, cement feet brooding in injustice and righteousness, his father takes the steps necessary to go to him. Seeing him in all his anger, all his hurt, he pleads with him and reminds him that he has always been seen. "Son you are always with me and all that is mine is yours." While the oldest boy remains far off, the father sees him once again and meets him in all his fullness - sinner and forgiven, unworthy and beloved.

Jesus tells this story in response to the Pharisees and scribes who are grumbling and saying "This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them." The Pharisees and scribes are concerned because Jesus sees the tax collectors and the sinners. Jesus sees them in all their fullness – sinners and forgiven, unworthy and beloved - and still welcomes them in extravagant love.

But while they were still far off, the father saw them...

The Pharisees and scribes struggle with this, just as the eldest son does – feeling this unjust in their righteousness before God. Through the parable Jesus seems to remind them that they are seen too.

While they remain far off, far off in their understanding of God, the father sees them in all their fullness as well – sinners and forgiven, unworthy in their own righteousness but rather made righteous as beloved children of God.

We too are children far off. We demand what we have not earned, squander what we have been given, live in ways outside of God's dream for God's people. We form our confessions, "We have sinned against you in thought, word and deed by what we have done and by what we have left undone..."

We grumble, stubborn in our feelings of righteousness, with cement feet, unwilling to celebrate God's grace when it feels unjust from our positions of self-centeredness. We confess that sometimes we don't want the father to see and extend such extravagant love towards all people.

But while we are still far off, the father see us...the father sees you...in all of your fullness - sinner and forgiven, unworthy and beloved..

And upon seeing you is filled with compassion. The father runs towards you wherever you are - slumping down the road dirty, tear streaked and broken or out in the fields, working to try to earn your own righteousness, angry, stubborn and resistant to the table of grace.

You are seen – in all of your fullness! And embraced as a beloved child of God, poured over with extravagance.

"My Son...My Daughter...My Child...dead but now alive in Christ, lost but now found. Rejoice! Celebrate! I see you!"

Many of you may know Maxine. At the end of worship each Sunday as we would greet each other following the service, if you anyone ever tells Maxine “It is good to see you Maxine,” Maxine joyfully responds “It is good to be seen!”

It is good to be seen! – seen in all our fullness – sinner and forgiven, unworthy and beloved!

An internet article by Omad Safi ends:

*May we live like this.*

*May we see each other for who we are, for what we are. May we face each other, Seeing and being seen. Loving and being loved.*