

Sermon- Our Saviors Lutheran Church- 3/31/2019

4th Sunday in Lent- Text- Luke 15:1-3, 11-32

Which Wolf Will We Feed

Grace and Peace to you and from our Lord Jesus Christ. We experience yet another parable of Jesus in our Gospel lesson this morning. It's a reminder that our way is not God's way. Indeed, sometimes our way can be funny and suspect at the same time.

Pastor Paul has been advised by his doctor to lose 30 pounds or risk serious health consequences. The good pastor took his new diet seriously, even changing his driving route to the church building to avoid his favorite bakery. One morning, however, he arrived for a Bible Study carrying a gigantic devil's food cake. The class chuckled and chided him, but the Pastor just smiled. "This is a special cake," he explained. "I accidentally drove by the bakery this morning and there in the window were a bunch of delicious looking cakes. I felt this was no accident, so I prayed, Lord, if you want me to have one of those delicious cakes, let me have a parking place directly in front of the bakery. And sure enough," he continued, "the eighth time around the block, there it was!"

Yes, our ways are not God's ways. And the person who always reminds us of that concept is Jesus. Especially as he teaches using the parable method. It was his favorite mode of communicating God's ways. A parable is like looking in a mirror. We see ourselves or don't see ourselves in the parable. Let's look at this familiar parable, the parable of the prodigal son, and see if we see ourselves.

The parable was directed to the tax collectors and sinners but also to the Pharisees and teachers of the law. The Pharisees were criticizing Jesus because he was hanging around with sinners. Can you see yourself as part of the sinner crowd? That's easy. We all have clay feet. How about the Pharisees – the group that saw things only in a black and white mentality. No gray area. Probably hard to identify with that mentality, after all we are ELCA Lutherans, we see most things as gray. Maybe it is easier to see ourselves as one of the characters in the story.

Perhaps the prodigal son, the younger son. As the text tells us, he was basically a spoiled kid. He wanted his share of the inheritance now. Like yesterday. The father gives the kid a boatload of cash and off the younger son goes. The son engages in a lifestyle of drinking and partying but of course the money runs out. It always does. He gets a job feeding pigs, stomping around in the mud. Lousy lifestyle. So he ponders, maybe I should go home. The kid is so shallow he even practices a phony speech, over and over again until he gets it right. Can we see ourselves as this kid? Probably not. After all we make mistakes but this is a little over the top.

Well how about the elder brother? He's the faithful one, maybe we can identify with him? After all he stays with the old man, doing what he can do for the family farm. Doing all he can do. Seems like a perfect ELCA Lutheran to me. But - always a 'but'.

Remember that this parable was directed to the Pharisees. There is a religious question here. Should the newcomers be allowed into the company of the faithful ones? The Pharisees said no. I call this the charter member syndrome. That syndrome says we have been here from the beginning. We are not sure the new ones should be welcome. In other sermons I have shared with you the number of churches in Bay Ridge, Brooklyn that have closed because of this charter member syndrome. Is this us? Probably not. We are a welcoming congregation. We like and welcome those who are new to the faith.

Well, how about the father. He has waited and waited for the younger son to come home. And when he does, he throws a party. In other words he forgives. Totally, without reservation. Is that how we are in life? Maybe, but sometimes difficult for us. Even when we pray the Lords Prayer every Sunday.

The more I think about it, maybe the question is not who we can identify with, but rather, who would we like to emulate! And you and I know it would be the forgiving, caring father. That watch and every day we develop an attitude of forgiveness to all people we encounter, especially those closest to us. So how do we do that? I titled this exercise-in-a-homily, Which Wolf Will We Feed, because it reminded me of a story I had read long ago, actually a Cherokee Story.

A young boy came to his Grandfather, filled with anger at another boy who had done him an injustice. The grandfather said to his grandson, "Let me tell you a story. I too, at times, have felt a great hate for those that have taken so much, with no sorrow for what they do. But hate wears you down, and hate does not hurt your enemy. Hate is like taking poison and wishing your enemy would die. I have struggled with these feelings many times. It is as if there are two wolves inside me; one Wolf is good and does not harm. He lives in harmony with all, and always tries to forgive. But, the other wolf is full of anger and never forgives. The littlest thing will set him into a fit of temper. Sometimes it is hard to live with these two wolves inside me, because both of the wolves try to dominate my spirit."

The boy looked intently into his grandfather's eyes and asked, "Which Wolf will win, Grandfather?" The Grandfather smiled and said, "The one I feed."

Isn't that the truth? That's what this parable is all about - that we feed that part of us that talks about forgiveness. Remember when Peter asked Jesus, how many times should I forgive? Seven? Remember the response from Jesus. No. 70 times 7. And he didn't mean 490. He meant always. Forgive us our sins as we forgive others.

That's the Wolf inside us that we need to constantly feed.

Can we? Absolutely. Jesus said he would help.

Amen

Let it be so.

