

“Our Reckless, Excessive God”  
Luke 15:1-3, 11-32  
March 27, 2022

This year our nation will mark the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting in Connecticut – the deadliest mass shooting at an elementary school in U.S. history. I’m sure there will be all kinds of memorials, tributes, and interviews that will take place to remember those who were tragically killed. One man who the press will probably try to interview is Peter Lanza, the father of Adam Lanza, who committed the shootings – including killing his own mother and then taking his own life that day. Over the years Peter Lanza has done several interviews and has said on numerous occasions not a day goes by that he doesn’t think about his son and wonder why he was so reckless. Imagine the deep sense of sorrow this man feels for his son’s behavior as he tries to make sense of what transpired and wonders what he did wrong.

In our Gospel lesson for today we see the familiar story of another reckless son. It’s the story of the Prodigal Son and if you look up the word, “prodigal” in the dictionary or online you will find the word defined as “reckless, excessive, extravagant.” And while those words certainly define the behavior of the younger son in the story, the real prodigal is not the younger son, instead it is the father.

I think Jesus’ audience (who happened to be a group of scholarly religious leaders who thought they knew all about God) understood, as well as you and I, that the father in this parable represents God; and the first thing we learn about his father is that he has 2 sons. The younger son basically tells his father, “Dad, I wish you were dead.” That sounds harsh, but when the younger son asks for his portion of the inheritance now, while his father is still fully alive, what

he is really telling his dad is, “You have no value to me, dad. Just give me my portion of the inheritance now and I won’t bother you anymore.”

As awful and hurtful as that younger son was being with his request, that is not real problem. The real problem here is that the father’s relationship with his younger son is completely broken. Can you imagine treating your own father or mother this way? But that, in essence, is what we say and do to God, our Heavenly Father, every time we choose to go our own way instead of His, anytime we choose to sin. Sin is rooted in our desire to do our own thing and to be our own person. We don’t want God interfering, so in our words and actions we tell Him that we really don’t have time for Him and that we’ll be just fine without Him.

What’s so amazing is that God allows this, just as the father in the parable gives his son exactly what he asked for – his share of the inheritance. The son may never return when he leaves, but the father apparently sees no point in refusing him or stopping him, because the relationship has already been broken and keeping him at home wouldn’t bring back the lost love and respect.

In addition, the older son is really no better than the younger son. His relationship with the father is just as broken. He doesn’t love or respect his father either as he criticizes the father’s love for his brother. When the older son hears the celebration taking place inside the house, because his younger brother has come home, he refuses to go inside. And just as the father ran to welcome home the younger son, the father runs to the older son and pleads for him to come inside saying, “Son, wait, please come inside. It is appropriate for us to celebrate, because your brother was lost, but now he is found. Isn’t that great news?” But the older son basically says, “Dad, you’ve got this all wrong. I have been obedient to you and you never did anything like this for me.” Sadly, the older brother views his relationship with his father as one of obedience

and reward, just like the religious leaders Jesus is speaking to in this text, instead of love and respect. As a result, he is also lost to his father.

So what does this parable tell us about God? First, we see that He is a rejected God. The religious leaders in Jesus' day rejected Him and that's what we do to Him when we choose to sin. But the second thing we see is that Jesus is a running God. The father in the parable ran to both of his sons who were lost and welcomed them and loved them; and that's what Jesus does to us.

I was visiting one of our families at their home several years ago and I noticed a picture on a table in their home of their children hugging a dog, but they were all wet and muddy. The parents explained that their dog had a habit of running out of the house whenever they would open the door, which they said was very frustrating, but usually he would just run around the yard or maybe to a neighbor's yard and then would come back. But one day he ran out and did not come back. As a result the family looked for him for days, but couldn't find him. Finally, about two weeks later, their dog came home. He was wet, muddy, and smelled awful. He was absolutely disgusting, but they were so happy to have him back home. If I had asked this couple why their children were hugging this dirty, filthy dog before they had a chance to clean him, I'm sure they would have looked at me in a rather odd way, because the answer was obvious – their children loved their dog and it didn't matter what he looked like or smelled like, they were happy to have him home.

God loves us infinitely more than any child has ever loved their dog. While we certainly understand why the father ran to welcome his son home, I'm sure if we were one of the servants working on his land or if we lived in that community, we would have found it odd that the father joyfully welcomed the boy back home. If we saw that dirty, hungry, disgusting bum of a son coming back to his father's house we probably would have thought, "He has some nerve coming back here. I wonder if his dad will even let him back in the house?" But the father only cared

about one thing – getting his son back, and so he ran and hugged and kissed his son, because he loved him. That is an extravagant love.

Can you imagine how dirty and disgusting we must appear to God, because of our sin? And yet, God runs to us to welcome us home, because there is nothing we can do to make ourselves worthy to be called his sons and daughters. God ran to us, saved us through His Son's death on the cross, gave us faith, and washed us clean of our sins in baptism, even though we don't deserve it. That is a reckless, excessive love.

Remember what the younger son had planned to do when he came home? In verses 18-19 he said, "I will go to my father and say to him, 'Father, I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants.'" But before he even gets a chance to make that offer it says in verse 20, "But while he was still a long way off, his father ran and embraced him and kissed him." And the son says, "Dad, I am no longer worthy to be called your son," but before he finishes the father insists that he is going to give his son a party and he gives him the best clothes to enjoy. The point is, the relationship was repaired immediately and his status in the family was restored. No price to pay, no conditions to meet, nothing is held back – because the father loved his son.

But there is one thing that is missing from this parable and that is an ending. The father pleads for the older son to come in and join the celebration, but we are not told what the older son decides to do. All we see is the father standing there – waiting, because he loves this son too. So not only is our God a rejected, running, and restoring God, He is also a waiting God. He waits for us and all people who have rejected Him with His arms open wide to come to Him. For many of the people who heard Jesus tell this story, they thought that kind of love from the father was ridiculous – no father would show such reckless, excessive, extravagant love. But we have a

prodigal God, who has lavished that kind of love on us and calls us His dearly loved children, despite our sin and disobedience, because that's who we are. So how does this story end for you?