

Good Morning,

When Susanne asked me to speak this Sunday she told me that there wasn't really a curriculum for the summer and so the topic was open for me to talk about whatever I wanted. And so naturally I had no idea what I was going to talk about. But fortunately while talking to my Dad about speaking in church this summer he told me that for his time for speaking he is supposed to pick his favourite sort from the old testament to speak about. So I decided that I would reflect on my favourite parable which is the parable of the prodigal son.

The Prodigal son is my favourite for a few reasons. In my opinion it, rather succinctly, outlines the relationship between God and God's people throughout history; It describes the fullness of grace that is integral to good parenting; and in my opinion it gives reason to God's gift of free will to humanity.

The story of the Prodigal son begins with the younger son humiliating the father by asking for his rightful inheritance while his father was still alive. And in a very short time he spends it all on the things in life that he thinks will make him happy and fulfilled. But he soon realizes that the work that he had to do for his father growing up really wasn't all that bad. Not only that but while working and living with his father there was someone who cared for him and took care of him when he needed it. In a sense this is what takes place in the garden at the beginning of our Bible. God gives to humanity everything that God has created to govern and take care of. While with God in the garden Adam and Eve learn about God's creation and learn all about what is right and wrong to do, or perhaps what is good and evil within the created order. But Adam and Eve are convinced by the serpent that they are unsatisfied with what God has given them and desire more.

So they eat of the fruit of the tree of good and evil and separate themselves from God to create life from their own understanding of what is good and what is evil. And so humanity took their inheritance from God and in a lot of ways squandered it. And just like the younger brother, they very soon realize how much harder life is away from their home and away from their Father. But like the loving nature of the father in the story of the prodigal son God did not abandon God's children even though they were abandoned by their children. Throughout the old testament God is continuously trying to reconnect with the God's people. Through the use of many prophets God tries to teach humanity how to live in right relationship, both, with God and each other. The story of the prodigal son ends with the son coming home to his father. And instead of having to seek him out and apologize for what he has done, the father humiliates himself by going against custom and running out to meet his son. And goes even further by throwing a feast for his son who had so horribly wronged him before. In the story of our Bible God too acts this way. God humbles themselves by making part of their being into human form so that we may again be in the presence of God and learn once again what is the right and good way to live. In this way God is humbled even further as Jesus' life comes to an end through the form of Roman crucifixion. But even after his death Jesus returns to the people that deserted him so that they may grow in their relationship with him and with God. In my Bible there is a commentary at the bottom of the page for most stories, written by Eugene Peterson. And about the prodigal son he says this. " [The father] is not concerned about how it looks, the great patriarch kissing the younger renegade, who has dishonoured him, and pleading with the older renegade, who has also dishonoured him, [by his refusal to join the celebration]. Love does not care if it looks foolish. Love only asks that it be allowed to love at whatever cost." Through this story of the prodigal son God shows us that God does not care how many

times we turn away or disregard God. God only wants us to love God and allow ourselves to be loved by God even though we are undeserving of such a love.

Shortly after I graduated from high school, my parents taught me the beauty of this gracious love between parents and children. It was not that I had a grand inheritance that I squandered, and I didn't quite live as exuberant a life as the younger son in this story; but not long after I had moved to Saskatoon with some friends from high school there was a party at my house. And I decided that I was going to have fun and test the limits of my alcohol tolerance. Though I didn't do anything stupid or harmful to myself or anyone else, I got quite intoxicated and was sick throughout the entirety of the next day. After this evening of "fun", I was quite ashamed of the experience that I had had because, in my mind it quite severely rebelled against the values that my parents had tried to instil in me as I was growing up. About five or six months after the event I was at home with just my parents and I was, for some reason, compelled to tell them my story of that night. And to my surprise, their response was not of anger, or even disappointment really, but instead they wanted to talk about how that experience affected me. Like the father in the prodigal son and like God throughout our Bible, my parents were happy that I had come back to them and desired to have a relationship with them. And it became apparent to me, at that time, that the form of my relationship with my parents had changed. Though they would forever be mentors to me and be there for me when I go through hard times, financially or otherwise, we had reached a point where my parents no longer told me what to do and how to live my life. But they put their trust in me hoping that I would rely on the virtues and values they taught me as a child as I began to understand who I was becoming as an adult. Which I imagine, and only recently began to understand, is a terrifying aspect of parenting.

In my role as a dean at RJC I got experience some aspects of parenthood. I got to take students to their sporting events and watch in pride as they excelled on the field or court; I got to listen to their choir performances and sometimes was given the opportunity to join. And having been deemed the dorm dad quite early in my role as dean, I took every liberty to make students squirm and groan at my “dad jokes”. But in addition to these things I also, on occasion had the opportunity to have late night discussions about life with the students. During the last couple weeks of the school year this spring I had a rather interesting conversation with one of my students who was having somewhat of an existential crisis. He was finding it difficult to reconcile the stories of God’s retribution in the old testament with the portrayal of a benevolent God in the new testament. This issue bothered him to the point in which he questioned his belief in the Bible all together. After a discussion about the importance of context and the reality that the punishments that we deem to be harsh were actually quite lenient in relation to what other cultures of the time would do, he asked me whether I choose to be a Christian or is that being a Christian something that is merely a matter of fact of who I am. And I told him that yes I do choose to be a christian and that it is because of this parable and it’s depiction of God’s relationship with us that I choose to be a Christian. Allow me to elaborate... As I said earlier we, as God’s children, are a people who have set ourselves apart from God right from the onset of our History book called the Bible. And we are a people who are far more ready to blame God for the evil that goes on in our world than to thank God for the good. Many times when there is news of a massive shooting or a horrible event people ask the question: “Where was God in that?”; or “If God is all powerful and all loving the how could “he” allow something like this to happen?” But we forget that it is and was our choosing, not God’s, to govern ourselves

apart from God's intended life for us. And it is my belief that because God is all loving that God does not intervene whenever we do something that is not according to God's plan and purpose. Because God knows that we would not actually have love for someone who forces us to do their will. In fact if God controlled all aspects of our life it would seem not as though we are living but rather merely existing. But at the same time God has not abandoned us to our own volition. Just like any good parent God has given us the tools we need, as we grow up, through the prophets of the old testament; through the perfect example of Jesus; and the ever present Holy Spirit to learn to live in the way that God hoped for us. And just like in my relationship with my parents, I choose to be a Christian, to live in love because God lets me choose to do so. And all I need to do is allow myself to be love by God.

Amen.