

Kramer Chapel CTS  
Monday in Trinity 15

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Forgiveness of Sins: Divine Disruption  
Luke 15:1-3, 11-32

“It is not fair.” We hear in the words that children speak to parents, protesting if not their own innocence in some particular misadventure, at least the plea that the punishment that dad or mom is doling out should be less severe, less burdensome. Professors, truth be told, might even from time to time hear it in the lament of a student stuck with a grade that seems to be less generous. We want fairness; we demand justice. That is understandable. We long for a world that is predictable, where we know ahead of time the consequences of our behavior. We want to be assured that we get what we deserve. Diligence and hard work deserve reward. Laziness and lack of effort merit nothing. “Good, better, best. Never let it rest until your good is better and your better is best.” And if your better is best then there should be some pay off, some benefit in it for you. You should get what you have earned, what you deserve be that in wages, grades or recognition.

That is the way things work in the world and we expect it to be so. The elder son in the parable knew that. He lived with the knowledge that he was different from his younger brother. He had stayed home. He was obedient to his dad, investing his life in doing all the things that loyal sons should do. Now when his little brother comes home after wasting his father’s wealth in a reckless and self-satisfying life only to be embraced and celebrated, he is angry. It is not fair. The father’s forgiveness is disruptive. It’s a threat to his righteousness. Doesn’t his obedience count for something and merit some recognition?

The late Gerhard Forde was fond of saying that sinners come in two varieties. There are those who are addicted to **lawlessness** and then there are those who are addicted to **lawfulness** is the way that he put.

The prodigal son is the lawless one. He grabs for freedom. He takes the inheritance and runs leaving his father as dead. He quickly enacts the truth of the old proverb that a fool and his money are soon parted. The prodigal’s pleasure soon turns to pain. The carefree life that he had chosen for himself

is now a burden. His freedom is bondage as he realizes that he had exchanged life in his father's home for life in a pig pen.

Jesus says that the prodigal comes to himself. His lawlessness cannot sustain his life. He prepares a confession and returns home only with the request to be hired hand. But before he can get the words out of his mouth, he is intercepted by the very father he had rejected and declared dead. The father does not wait until his son is bathed and dressed in clean clothes before he hugs him. In his gladness to recover his son, the father does not turn away from the dirt and the body odor. He does not tell his son to first prove himself worthy of being readmitted to the family. He does not consign the son to a period of penitential probation. The father's verdict is expressed in his actions. Calling for the best robes, the ring and the killing of the fatted calf, the father enfolds his son in the forgiveness of sins. With the father's forgiveness, that son who was dead is alive. That's what forgiveness of sins does – gives life to dead!

That absolution was disruptive. For the prodigal, it was restoration to sonship. But for his older brother, the father's pardon of his wayward sibling brought to light his own sin; his own addiction to **lawfulness**. We hear then from his lips the protestation of his righteousness, his self-righteousness. It is a self-righteousness that blinds him both to the goodness of his father-goodness that was there for him all along as well as blindness to the miracle that had just taken place before his eyes. For his brother was dead, but is now alive. His brother was lost but now is found.

The answer both **lawlessness** and **lawfulness** is confession and absolution. We heard it again from the Catechism this morning. "Confession has two parts. First, that, we confess our sins, and second that we receive absolution, that is forgiveness, from the pastor as from God Himself, not doubting but firmly believing that by it our sins are forgiven before God in heaven." The Lord who tells us the parable of the two sons-the **lawless** sinner and the **lawful** sinner is the One whose association with sinners would cost Him His life. By His death you are redeemed from **lawlessness** and **lawfulness**. His absolution spoken here on earth says how it is before God in heaven. So hear it once again just for the sheer joy of it: "In the stead and by the command of my Lord Jesus Christ, I forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."