



17 November 2024

Twenty-Sixth Sunday after Pentecost

Pastor Chris

Well. I do not mind telling you there have been some disappointing developments this week. Thursday – was Red Cup Day at Starbucks – the day you wrestle the holiday crowd (we know what that is like here on Christmas and Easter – right) to pick-up your drink and get your free Holiday Red Cup. I missed it! And when I went back at 3 – They. Were. Out! And then Friday, after work, I drove to get the special honey whole wheat bread from our favorite bakery in Delafield. Yes, it is out of the way. Yes, it is worth it. I brought it home. We were sitting on the couch that night and someone knocked on the door. Our son came home from Madison. What a surprise! A great surprise! Just home for laundry and to do a little shopping in our basement and pantry. No problem. And the next morning – homemade breakfast and Andrew had a friend picking him up to go back to Madison. And as my son packed his clean laundry, Kleenex, microwave popcorn, extra coffee mugs, and peanut butter – I watched as my wife, chose her first born over her husband, by giving him the entire loaf of freshly baked honey whole wheat bread. Oh, we love you, Andrew. Yeah right! Not even a slice! I'm telling you – disappointment!

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus, the Christ. Amen.

In our house, I am in charge of the coffee. I grind the beans. I scoop the grounds into the filter. I fill the carafe with filtered water. I set the timer. And in the morning, the smell of coffee meets me at the bottom of the stairs. And you know – you just know – the day will be okay. A couple of months ago, my wife started a new workout routine at the ungodly hour of 5:45am. No problem- I started wearing ear plugs to not give-in to being fully awake at 5:45 with her. She usually leaves for the gym at 6:05 and I am responsible for the 6th grader and sometimes the 10th grader to raise them from the dead and move them to the front door. Usually, I wake them up and then head downstairs to welcome the first rays of sunlight and the whispers of coffee scented steam that rise from the sacred vessel of impending joy. So, imagine my surprise, when I stepped off the last carpeted stair to the disturbing smell of burnt coffee. What crime has been committed? Entering the kitchen, to my deep disbelief, I found coffee and coffee grounds pouring out of the top of the machine, down the side of the carafe, on to the counter, and down the cabinets to where it pooled on the floor. Complete devastation! And who is to blame – my wife! After taking a cup of coffee while the coffee pot was still creating joy, in her rush to get out the door, she did not line up the carafe with the spout and the coffee pot, having nowhere to go, recirculated on itself and gave up. Devastation turned to rage. How could she? What a waste! What a tragedy! I made the girls breakfast and their lunches and then began to clean up the disaster. The girls left for school. New coffee was ground. New water filled the carafe. And with only a minor delay – the divine whispers began to fill the downstairs. I poured my coffee and moved to the couch to wait for my wife to come home.

Jesus continued, “There was a man who had two sons.” Of all the stories in the Bible, this may be one of the few stories that people outside the church have some memory of hearing. There are lost sheep, lost coins, and today a lost child.

¹² The younger one said to his father, ‘Father, I want right now what’s coming to me.’ So, the father divided his property between them. ¹³ “Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there wasted his wealth in wild living. ¹⁴ After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he got hungry. ¹⁵ So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. ¹⁶ He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything.” ¹⁷ “When he came to his senses, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired servants have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! ¹⁸ I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. ¹⁹ I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired servants.’ And the younger son got right up and went home to face his father.”

What the younger son did not know, is that his father was waiting for him to come home. What the younger son did not know, is that his father was praying for him to come home. What the younger son did not know, is that the father was just as hungry as his younger son – the only difference was how they would each be filled. How could the younger son have known? For all of his wild living and wasted money and time, we are



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never told whether the younger son remembers home. The smell of his mother's cooking, the sound of his father's laughter, the sunset over the fields, the warmth of a favorite blanket when the cold night air wakes you up. It is possible the younger son wrestles with going home sooner than we might expect, but we are not told that part of the story. Does the younger son regret his decision before he runs out of money? Does he believe he will only be met with anger and disappointment? Does he weigh the balance of resentment and bitterness by family with the possible relief of an unexpected welcome? What the younger son does not know is that which those of us who have some years of living behind us know all too well. We are broken people living in a broken world with other broken people. We all need grace. Do you need to hear that again? We are broken people living in a broken world with other broken people. We all need grace.

²⁰⁻²¹ "When he was still a long way off, his father saw him. His heart pounding, he ran out, embraced him, and kissed him. The son started his speech: 'Father, I've sinned against God, I've sinned before you; I don't deserve to be called your son ever again.' ²²⁻²⁴ "But the father would not listen. My son is here - given up for dead and now alive! Given up for lost and now found!' And they began to celebrate. The son returns home. He brings his shame, his guilt, his accountability for his decisions. He brings his humiliation like an old friend – the only friend he has known since the money ran out. His father wipes it all away. His father has every right to discipline and denigrate his son. We might expect at least one, "I told you so," to fall from his father's lips. But what we hear instead are words of joy, "my son is here!" The biting hunger the father has felt in his gut for far too long is now satisfied with the revelation he now holds in his arms. The son will also be fed by the welcome his father offers to him. There is only one hungry soul left at this point in the story

²⁵⁻²⁷ "All this time his older son was out in the field. When the day's work was done he came in. As he approached the house, he heard the music and dancing. Calling over one of the servants, he asked what was going on. He told him, 'Your brother came home. Your father has ordered a feast because he has him home safe and sound.' ²⁸⁻³⁰ "The older brother stomped off in an angry sulk and refused to join in. His father came out and tried to talk to him, but he wouldn't listen. The son said, 'Look how many years I've stayed here serving you, never giving you one moment of grief, but have you ever thrown a party for me and my friends? Then this son of yours who has thrown away your money on prostitutes shows up and you go all out with a feast!' ³¹⁻³² "His father said, 'Son, you don't understand. You're with me all the time, and everything that is mine is yours—but this is a wonderful time, and we had to celebrate. This brother of yours was dead, and he's alive! He was lost, and he's found!'" His father could have just as easily said, "Son, we are broken people living in a broken world with other broken people. We all need grace. But I think the father knew better. "This brother of yours was dead, and he is alive. He was lost and he is found! And that my friends is the end of the story.

We carry the weight of our brokenness with us even when our Father reminds us of the joy that comes from being found. Claim your shame. Own your guilt. Acknowledge your accountability. Pay homage to your humiliation. And then watch the Savior of the world come running to meet you on the long road towards home. When the sun is setting and the shadows are long. Let the embrace of your Savior, wash away all that you have carried with regret. And be reminded that you are worth so much more to God than you can possibly imagine. So much more – that our God sends others into our lives to help us remember when the road is longer than we expected. All we need is to give thanks and ask God to bless them.

Bless them-who wait with us, who labor with us, who cry out with us

Bless them-who know our limits, who push us beyond them, who see us through

Bless them-who call us to our strengths, who tend us in our weakness, who dress each ragged wound

Bless them-who laugh in the face of convention, who weep for our own pain, who bid us come and live.

The welcome of our Father will come soon enough – we only need turn our face towards home. Amen.