

## Come to your Senses!

Reading: Luke 15:11-24

Message: Luke 15:17, "What exactly did this young man realize when he came to his senses?"

The story of the young man being a brute to his parents, resonates with us. We see in his behaviour a brother or sister, a relative or friend. We know of someone who has acted scandalously. It shocks us that a person can be so selfish and are left bewildered by their sick behaviour.

The path of self-destruction is one which a young man or woman hurdles down even though it will destroy them. We see them go. We warn them. We pray and beg them not to. But they go anyway.

Jesus knows such behaviour and he would not have us stand by feeling hopeless for the fools who do such things to themselves. He wants to give us hope. It is the story of the gospel – a story of hope. For that reckless young man is me and it is you. Self-destructive desires are powerful to the broken soul. We all have an obsessive compulsive draw to destructive habits. I'm not just talking about drugs and other addictive substances. I'm talking about a life of sinful revolt against God, which can only end in our destruction. Jesus would not stand by, wringing his hands in helpless agony for us.

Here is the story.

It begins in verse 1-2 where we read about the religious leaders grumbling because Jesus associated with and even ate with tax collectors and other notorious sinners. But Jesus associated with them because that's what God does. God wants to be known as the one who lifts up the fallen, and heals the broken. This is what the religious leaders in Jesus' day did not understand. He wants to be known as the one who receives sinners and eats with them – after they have come to their senses! Not before.

Here's the story. A young man demands his full share of the family estate. The father determines how much that is and gives it all in cash to his son. The older son stays on – no worldly adventure draws him away. The young man takes the cash and leaves. He goes far away. Sometimes young people do that: They want to get far far away from home to 'find themselves', as they say. They set out on an adventure of freedom they've never experienced before. In this instance, the young man cannot control his freedom. It becomes for him a huge hazard. He soon squanders the 1000's of dollars on wild living. The older son observed later on that he spent it on prostitutes (vs30). Soon he had no more. His money was gone – spent, stolen, given away. He is penniless and landless in a foreign country. Then a second stroke falls: a famine. When a famine strikes, generosity dries up as the needy class grows; opportunities disappear and security is gone.

The young man is reduced to desperation. He works for a pig farmer – it's the only thing he can find. For a Jew, a pig is the image for uncleanness. It stresses his aloneness – far from God and far from home. He is as isolated as a man could be.

And the pigs were better off than him.

This is the moment, this is the condition of utter alienation and desperation that became like first aid to the soul. It jumpstarted his conscience to life again. The guilt that had been building up in his conscience suddenly flooded his heart and mind. He had acted the part of a fool, ignoring everyone's shock and horror,

but he did not escape the guilt. It only came later. It came now. And when it came, he could hardly breathe. It brought him to his senses.

This is everything to Jesus. You see, he does not love tax collectors and sinners more than Pharisees and teachers of the law. But he loves a person who falls on his knees and cries out "O God I'm so sinful! O God, what have I done?" Jesus loved the tax collectors and sinners only because they are the ones who admit their guilt. They can hardly breathe because of shame for what they have done.

For our God says, "I dwell in the high and holy place, and also with him who is of a contrite and lowly spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly, and to revive the heart of the contrite." (Isaiah 57:15) That is why Jesus welcomed the tax collectors and sinners – to revive these contrite and lowly spirits.

The young man came to his senses. The journey to healing begins here: I am destroying myself. I am helpless to stop sinning. I need someone to rescue me. O help me God! O save me Jesus! That is what it means Jesus says that he came to his senses. That is why reformed churches say that the first step in Christianity is recognizing our sinfulness and feeling deeply miserable because of it. That is the person whom Jesus loves.

This is what he said, "I will return to my father and say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you."

He stopped thinking that he was entitled to all things in the world. He accepted that he deserved the suffering which he now was feeling. I am not worthy of what I once demanded. For I have sinned not just against the people who have loved me most, but against the Creator, against my Saviour, against my God. I have made myself God and I have demanded the world to serve my pleasure. I have even sacrificed my own family to my pleasure.

It is very special what that young man says: he did not say that he had sinned against both his parents and his God, but against God in the presence of his parents. My parents were therefore grieved not so much by my abuse of their love, but my godlessness, my rejection of all that God demands of me, and the consequence that that brings: loss of my saviour Jesus and loss of the hope of heaven.

All this came to his mind when he came to his senses.

So he set off for home. To his great amazement, though everyone had abandoned him, his parents did not. They never stopped looking for his return, never stopped praying for his conversion, and remaining every vigilant for his return. For we read in verse 20, "And he arose and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him."

What a moment for that father. All that he longed for had now come true; all the pain that he had suffered could now be released in a moment. It meant nothing to him now. His son was coming home. Whatever pain he had, did not matter. His son had come to his senses and was returned home.

That is why Jesus welcome the tax collectors and sinners. God the Son, God the Father, God the Holy Spirit – he is the Father waiting for us. He watches for us to come home; he from whom come all things, longs for you to return to him.

The prodigal son is me. The prodigal son is you. Come to your senses. Confess what you have done against heaven in the presence of others, and feel the shame for what your faithless deeds toward him. And resolve

to return to him. Jesus is watching for you. All the agony he endured for your salvation will be forgotten when he embraces you in love.