

THE PARABLE OF THE EXTRAVAGANT FATHER

Jesus could tell very interesting stories. This one was a real heaven of a story with a very human meaning. It seems that once upon some time or other there was this family, see – and the mother was dead, or something I guess – so it was just two boys – (since they weren't twins, of course one was older and one was younger) and their Dad, he was the oldest of them all – naturally. Dads always are. So the three of 'em lived together on this big farm. See. These two guys and their old man. And the two boys were kinda' _____, just the right age to think their Dad was sure 'nuff dumb, a real old foggy, a real square – in fact the way the young on treated him and the way the older one sassed him right to his face – you could tell they tried awful hard to make their father the family goat. Their Momma may have been dear – but poor Papa was the goat – no doubt about it. They blamed him for everything – found lots of fault with him – it was sort of their sport – a game the sons played – called “What's Dad done wrong today?” Or “Making Pop pay.” The young one said the father was too stingy – the old one said he was a sucker for giving in to the kid brother's demands – partial to his baby boy – so these two boys didn't get along very well either – fought and scrapped all the time – and when the Dad tried to referee and be fair and square with both of 'em, he just got hit from both sides.

Can't help feeling kinda sorry for the father – for Jesus makes it pretty clear in his story about him – that he was a real nice guy – a good Dad to his boys – too good maybe?—at least they didn't try awful hard to understand and appreciate him – so he was a kind of a lonely father, see? Dads often are kinda lonely fellows, did you know that? After all, if you were a father – living along in a big farm with two boys who didn't get along too well and didn't specially seem to love you either – and who treated you like “gimmie what you got and get lost, Dad, get lost!” How would you feel? If you were the father, that is. Bad, I'll bet. Mighty bad. Two boys who think they can get by with anything don't make a dad too happy, I don't guess

But let's get back to why we called him an “Extravagant Father” -- Jesus didn't call him that, we did. (Jesus didn't call the kid brother a prodigal son either – the Church thought that up).

But the father was extravagant – in some mighty obvious ways –in some good way the boys ought to have been glad about. He was an exceptional Dad, let Jesus tell you.

First of all, he was an extra hard worker – their old man was. He must have been. He'd worked, worked hard – really put out – all his life. And don't kid yourself, he hadn't just been working for himself – he'd been working for those boys too. How do you think he got that big farm? All that “property?” – Those “hired hands?” That “money” he gave them? – Those “best clothes” he put on them? Those “shoes” he bought? Those top round steaks from fatted calves? Those rings for presents? Those parties he let them have? He worked for it all – that's how. And he never threw it up to them either (Some Dads do, but it's because they're desperate and we don't hold it against them.) He didn't keep telling 'em every day how hard he worked for 'em – he hated to do that – besides, he thought the boys ought to have enough sense to see that for themselves – and it must have hurt him that they didn't see or say a kind word to him – but he didn't mention that either – he just took it – O, he was a goo dad, alright – a mighty fine Father.

On the other hand, the boys' attitude toward work was quite a different story. The older one – he worked O.K. – but he griped about it all the time – (And if there's anything worse than somebody not working – it's somebody who works and gripes about it all the time.) – whined and complained – and said his old man drove him like a slave and he was sick and tired of it. But he was just a self-pitier and not about to die from overwork, believe me. And the younger boy? He just didn't work – period! He just to _____ on the old man's money – live it up big on his inheritance, lie around the club and whistle at the girls. He was a delayed adolescent – in his 20's he acted like he was still in his teens.

Meanwhile, back at the farm. You might think the Dad would have gotten tired of the whole shooting match and maybe quit work altogether – since these two didn't appreciate it – and just taken off to Egypt or somewhere for a little fun and leave his two sons quarrelling and alone. But he didn't. He just kept right on working and hoping and praying (I suppose) that things would work out somehow. O, he was a hard, an extra hard worker, this parent was, and he became a prosperous man, a man of real estate property – and there's nothing bad about that now, is it? At least, he earned it. The boys just wanted to inherit it.

By now, you know the second way this man was an extravagant father. He was not only an extra hard worker. He was really extravagant in his generosity. His very nature – was to give and give and keep on giving. Why, the hired help on his place had more to eat than they knew

what to do with. Maybe he was too generous with the boys? Gave 'em too much? I don't know. No man every actually knows when he's overdone it.

Of course, the elder brother thought he had overdone it at least where the younger was concerned, but you can't bank on his opinion because he was jealous of his little brother.

And you know some boys are never satisfied no matter how much you give em. There's always somebody else for 'em to look at whose got more – and they “want are like _____ that, Dad.” “How come we can't have a boat and trailer?” I can just imagine the father in this story getting after the younger boy about the girl he was going with – and the boy saying, “But gee, Dad, she's the best I can get with the car we've got!” – except he probably said “Comet.”

Well, anyway, whether the boys appreciated it or not – the father was generous – even extravagant in it.

Whereas the big brother? Him lavish? That's a laugh! He was stingy – and a prissy, parsimonious and rather spiteful fellow to boot – so righteous and so hard to live with. (I started to say, he'd make a good Presbyterian –, but I won't say that!)

And the younger? – He was generous only to himself – once he got his share – he blew it all. (Oh my, how easy that is to do!) On a big trip to the big city where he lived like a big shot – at least until the old man's money ran out – and he started to look for a job – for the first time in his life – only to discover that the men who handed out the jobs were all “old fogies” just like his father – except they didn't care a flip about him – his good looks couldn't charm them out of one thin coin – the way he could turn it on and get what he wanted out of his poppa – the world, he discovered, wasn't extravagant in its generosity – not like his Dad. It wasn't long before that young fella wished he were home. Lord, how he wished he were home! The big city didn't look so good when you were broke and all but a – a – a bum. The memory of his father was never sweeter. Too bad a boy sometimes has to sink so low before he starts looking up – but that's the way life often is. At least he did look up – and when he started back home – he was a different boy – he wasn't strutting and he wasn't greedy – he was humble and you know what? He was actually looking forward to hard work and to being as good a man as his father was before him. Lucky for him, his Dad was still alive, so he could go back and make amends – lucky for him.

And that father was good – mighty good – for – in the third and final place -- he was plumb extravagant in his forgiving love. He was really lavish in his love.

He forgave both boys – one for being a silly, young fool and the other for being a spiteful old skinflint. He opened the doors of his house – but more important – he opened the doors of his heart to them – and he said to those two scamps – “Well, come in! Come on in ...” and I think maybe they both did. I sure hope so. For their sake and the sake of their Dad. If they turned out to be half as fine a man as their father was – they turned out all right. I tell you. All right... What a father! And the whole point of Jesus’ story is: “God must be just like that!” I sure hope so.