

**Holy Trinity Lutheran Church
Des Moines, WA
March 10, 2013**

Luke 15:11-24

Don't Let It Get That Far

- 1. A Man Amongst the Pigs**
- 2. Trouble is Not That Far Off for Any of Us**
- 3. Don't Let it Get That Far!**

Hymns: 748 – 108 – 304 – Closing: 369

All Scripture quotations from NIV 1984

“He went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything.” Can you imagine? Can you imagine desiring a pig’s life? Smelly, disgusting, filthy. Yet, that is exactly what we heard happened to the young man we know as the Prodigal Son. He came to a point in life where he stood knee deep in pig slop, coveting what those dirty animals had. To say that he had hit rock-bottom would be an understatement, and as he longed for pig feed, he had to be wondering, “How did it get this far?”

Of course, we can look at the events of his life and quickly realize how it happened. We see glaring mistake after mistake. It started when he went to his father as a young and immature youth and asked for every cent of his inheritance. And from there, it was all downhill. He cashed out everything he had. He ran far away from everyone that he knew, from everyone that might have said something. He became friends with people who cared only about his money. He lived it up, and he didn’t stop until everything was gone. The events of his life played out in tragic digression and we can easily see how one mistake led to more and more. And it makes us wonder, just as we might whenever we see someone who has hit rock-bottom because of their own poor choices. “It is so obvious to us, so why couldn’t he see what was happening? Why did it have to go so far before they decided it was time to change?”

The prodigal son could not see what was happening in his life because he had been blinded. He was blinded by sin, by stupidity, by addiction, by arrogance. This son had been given so much in life. In every way, he experienced the love of a caring father. In the present, he lived a comfortable life under his father’s providing hand. In the future, he had the promise of an inheritance that would give him all that he could need and desire. But it wasn’t enough. He didn’t trust the life that his father had given him. He couldn’t wait for the riches that were in his future. He thought life could be better now; he didn’t want to wait.

So he would get away from his father’s watchful eye and he would see what the world had to offer. He thought he could have a little taste of earthly pleasures and then he would be able to curb his appetite for more. Certainly, he went out from his father’s house with every intention of sinning, but I’m sure, he also had every intention of getting out of that lifestyle before it spiraled out of control and he lost everything. But here was his fatal flaw: He stared down his sinful nature and foolishly thought, “I can control you all by myself.” But he could not. He gave sin a place to live, and before he knew what had happened, it had taken him down into the pig slop. That is how it got that far.

Here is the plain and scary truth: This kind of trouble is not that far off for any of us. If anyone thinks otherwise, just consider how similar we are to the Prodigal Son.

We, too, are all sons living under the loving providence of our Father. We are all sons of God through the work that Jesus Christ accomplished by living perfectly and dying on the cross. And because of that work, we enjoy a special relationship with our heavenly Father. In the present, He gives us everything that we need in life and more. We enjoy his protection each and every day. He is always right there to listen if we need something. He showers us with love. And in the future, he has given us the promise of an everlasting inheritance. Each of us who looks to Jesus Christ as our Savior from sin has the eternal glories of heaven waiting for us.

However, we also live in a sinful world, and each of us is still cursed with a sinful nature that is full of sinful desires. And that means that there is a constant threat looming in each one of our lives. Paul warns us when he says, “If you think that you are standing firm, be careful that you do not fall.” Really what Paul is saying is this, “What happened to the Prodigal Son could happen to us.”

Because it only takes one. It only takes one sin about which we say, “It isn’t that big of a deal.” It only takes one sin about which we boast, “I can control it.” If we allow a sin to reside in our lives, we

are living in a state of constant danger in which we are under constant attack.

When we leave a spot open for sin, we also leave a spot open for Satan. And while we think that we have control, Satan diligently strives to blind us to what is truly happening. He works hard to keep us from seeing the obvious progression of errors. He works hard to deafen our ears to the warnings that come from loved ones who so easily see the error of our ways. He works hard to blind us to the real results of a sinful lifestyle.

Satan has many tools with which he hides the danger of sin. He uses pride and arrogance to convince a cheater that they won't get caught. He uses addiction to blind an abuser from seeing the disastrous road they are travelling down. He uses "love" to excuse the lifestyle. Just look around. Many faithful Christians have got caught up in a way of life that they thought they could control and before they knew it, they were knee deep in pig slop, trying to figure out how it got that far.

However, it isn't just the "big" sins that threaten to take life down to the pig pen. There are an infinite number of "lesser" sins that share the same potential to take us down if they are not taken care of. Maybe it is the small grudge that is being held against a family member. Maybe it is the bit of laziness that has crept into work. Maybe it is the slow decline in church attendance and personal devotion.

Those sins which we say, "aren't that big of a deal" have the potential to tear families apart; to derail lives and careers; to destroy faith. And each one of you knows the sins that you excuse in your everyday lives. They have the power to put us right there with the pigs. Don't be blinded by pettiness, by stupidity, by apathy, by arrogance. Don't let it get that far! You don't have to be among the pigs before you come to a realization like this, **"When he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired men have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired men.' So he got up and went to his father."**

Instead, make repentance a part of your life each and every day.

It begins by finding the sins in your life and getting rid of the excuses. Take stock of your life and find each and every sin because they all threaten to destroy. Find the shortcomings and the failures. Identify the omissions and the wandering ways. Look for the negative attitudes and the spiteful feelings. Just as you ready yourself each day by looking in the mirror, use God's law to show you what is wrong in

your life. It isn't easy to do, it won't be pretty to look at, but it needs to be done. Find your sins, every one of them, every single day.

Then go to God your Father trusting his plan. Wherever you are in your battle with sin, you aren't on your own. You don't have to come up with your own plan of how you might return to God's good graces. You don't have to make the offer of working to earn his forgiveness. No matter where you have gone, no matter what you have done, even if you have been down by the pigs, you are still his child because of what Jesus has done for you. The promise that was given at your baptism assures you of that. You are a child of God, even when you live as a prodigal.

That means that when you confess, when you return from your sins, you will always find a loving Father, waiting with open arms, ready to embrace you as his own, ready to forgive you all your wrongs, ready to celebrate the relationship that has been restored.

So treasure what you are, treasure what you have! How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! And that is the truth for every Prodigal Son! Amen.