

(RE)ORIENT: NEVER TOO STUCK

Luke 15:11-32

Intro

There are times in a worship leader's life when there is a whole lot of planning that goes into the creation of a sermon series.

Then there are those other times when, before you know it, the threads you have been led to, connect in ways that you simply never saw coming. September of 2018 has very much been that for me.

Now before you get up and leave because you haven't been here for one (or any!) of those weeks, you're good: because even though they do absolutely feel connected (and have influenced each other), they are also able to stand alone.

From talking about how God sees you (Xander looking in the mirror got this all started), to allowing God to be God, especially in those times of difficulty, to recognizing the lie so many of us believe as the lie that it is (there's something wrong with me), to one of the ways that we respond to that lie by judging ourselves, they are all able to speak to truths that we are able to identify when we begin, even just begin, to reorient our perspective to leaning upon the God of all.

And again, I planned none of that...go God!

Which leads us to this morning.

Today we're going to be reminded that this reorientation leads us back to a loving God, a God who, through both successes and failures, is able to exhibit support and absolutely grace. We may not feel that we are worthy of this support and grace, and others may even question it's fairness in being extended, but the God whom we worship is God, is the Creator of all, and has shown time after time after time that He is willing to leave the 99 to rescue and welcome back the 1, regardless of how lost they may be. The familiar scripture reads this way.

Luke 15:11-32

11 Then Jesus said, 'There was a man who had two sons. 12The younger of them said to his father, "Father, give me the share of the property that will belong to me." So he divided his property between them. 13A few days later the younger son gathered all he had and travelled to a distant country, and there he squandered his property in dissolute living. 14When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that country, and he began to be in need. 15So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs. 16He would gladly have filled himself with the pods that the pigs were eating; and no one gave him anything.

17But when he came to himself he said, "How many of my father's hired hands have bread enough and to spare, but here I am dying of hunger! 18I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; 19I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands.'" 20So he set off and went to his father.

But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him. 21Then the son said to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son." 22But the father said to his slaves,

“Quickly, bring out a robe—the best one—and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. ²³And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; ²⁴for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!” And they began to celebrate.

²⁵ Now his elder son was in the field; and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. ²⁶He called one of the slaves and asked what was going on. ²⁷He replied, “Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has got him back safe and sound.” ²⁸Then he became angry and refused to go in. His father came out and began to plead with him. ²⁹But he answered his father, “Listen! For all these years I have been working like a slave for you, and I have never disobeyed your command; yet you have never given me even a young goat so that I might celebrate with my friends. ³⁰But when this son of yours came back, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fatted calf for him!” ³¹Then the father said to him, “Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. ³²But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found.” ’

John 14:12

Intro

Our second passage hops to a different Gospel account to remind us that all those who believe (yes, even the one who was utterly lost), are empowered (through the Holy Spirit) to not only ‘go and do likewise’, but even greater feats of faith in action.

Will there still be consequences to many of the variations of getting lost that we fall in to?

Absolutely.

But God has promised it...therefore it is so. So listen this one verse and know that it is for all those who are willing to follow the leading of God’s Spirit and reorient themselves to the God who was, is, and always will be. The scripture reads this way.

John 14:12

¹²Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father.

‘(re)orient: Never Too Stuck’

As I sat down to write the bulk of this morning sermon I felt like I was stuck in a cloud. Now part of that is because of the rain that we have continued to be inundated by (enough already!).

But I also felt that way because of the deaths that have affected various corners of our congregation. Three individuals (Warren Toyburg, Paul Tarashuk, and Jay Rau), all young (49, 26, and 41, respectively), all dying, in their own way, of tragic circumstances. I literally had two of their obituaries up on my computer at the same time on Friday morning, you know, as I was sitting down to allow these thoughts to come to the surface.

It was like that.

So as I started to allow these passages that I had been led to earlier in the week lean into me again, I had this feeling of being stuck in the mud, head and shoulders weighed down, and that’s without any of

these individuals being a part of my immediate family or 'an official', their name's signed in as a member, part of the church. And none of that mattered a lick, because these people were important in so many ways, and they were connected to us, to me, and that's where and why I felt stuck.

Alright, now the silly question: has anyone else ever felt like that at any point in their life for any reason at all?

Exactly! And the last couple of worship services have been able to remind us of that reality in our own lives (the shredder and balloon wall are up here to act as the visual reminders of those realities).

We feel stuck.

Well, how did the Prodigal Son feel? I still remember a Sunday School leaflet from my youth that pictured him filthy and sitting among the pigs in the pig sty. We are able to appreciate those visuals, and we get the idea (at least conceptually) of pride-fully blowing all the financial resources that we had at our disposal or feeling like we have burnt bridges with those whom we had been in relationship with.

But the level of worthlessness is even deeper than that. Remember, the Prodigal is of the Hebrew faith, pigs are ritually unclean, not only did you not eat them, you didn't care for them, and here he is thinking, 'you know, maybe I should just take the pig's food', you know, as he mucks their pen.

It's that bad. The separation and brokenness is that great. The feelings of worthlessness have become that embedded.

Are you starting to feel that a little more? That level of...stuckness? Hopelessness?

Ok, that's where the Prodigal has ended up and it is from that place that he crawls his way back to the family to beg, to beg to be a servant.

He makes his way back, beaten, defeated, humiliated, worthless, and he can't even look up as he gets within eyeshot of his family's home. He's looking at the tops of his feet!

What does he miss? He misses seeing his father seeing him first. He misses seeing his father go from 0 to 120 in no time flat as he runs out to greet his child who was so broken that he was living and eating with the pigs. The Prodigal was still stuck (we know this because he goes right into his beg of, 'please, please, please let me be your servant').

But his willingness to reorient, to recognize that he was wrong, or at the very least to recognize that he needed help, opened the door to the Prodigal's parent welcoming him home with a grace that feels...well, let's be honest, it feels miraculous, it feels over the top, it feels unbelievable.

But why does it feel unbelievable? Does it feel unbelievable because of who God has shown himself to be...or because of the limitations that we put on God? You know, the limitations that are formed because of our personal experience which, by and large, sees the experience of the Prodigal as...impossible.

Well, guess what: if we get anywhere near that sort of pool of thought, let alone believe it, what we are resonating with is another one of those lies that is whispered into our lives. Look, I get that our lives

may have been filled with illustrative examples of authority figures who were the exact opposite of the parent in the Prodigal story.

But that's not God. Let God be God and trust that His grace will not only welcome us back, but will restore us to a place of honor.

Yes, there will still be consequences from our missteps (the Prodigal's inheritance was gone), but the love of God is sure. I don't know what you might be feeling stuck in but start that reorientation, just start it, and God will come running, welcoming you back as His child, a child who will not only do great things but will do even greater things than the Messiah that was sent to build the bridge back to God in the first place.

See, I didn't forget that last verse that we read!

Jesus is talking with his friends, with the disciples (who for all intents and purposes, are us) and he is telling them, 'in a little while you won't be able to see me anymore, but that's okay because your heavenly parent will send an Advocate who will not only empower you to do similar things to what I've done...but even greater.'

Greater!

The Prodigal is so stuck that he's slumming with the pigs, and through the beginning of his reorientation, not only is he welcomed back but, connecting the dots, he will be empowered to go into the rest of his life and not only forgive but forgive in even greater ways; love and love in even greater ways.

That's us!

That's you!

That's me!

That's the person whom you are praying for because you feel they are hearing that whisper (there's something wrong with me)!

That is anyone and everyone who begins to reorient and continues to follow that path that they are led to take by the God who loves them so much that he was looking for them to return, even though they didn't have enough in them to lift their eyes and see their parent rushing out to them.

That is who are God is!

That is who you are to God!

Who do you see in the mirror? Quit listening to the lie, shred that lie and start to reorient back to God. Just start. He's waiting. God is waiting and not only will you be welcomed you will be empowered.

I know it seems impossible: that's the lie! Don't buy into the lie! Reorient! Your parent is waiting.

I don't know what in your life is causing you to feel stuck. We all have different things that may cause us to feel that way. Here's what I do know: you're never too stuck to begin the process of reorienting your life in the direction of God. Start. Just start: he'll be waiting.

After Sermon Prayer

God, as we listen to the truths that Your son has promised, we are reminded that we are never too stuck to begin to reorient back to You. Not only are You waiting for us, You will run to us to receive us in ways that we never thought possible, even to the point of empowering us to give in ways that are greater than Jesus himself. God, You have promised it, therefore it is true. Help us to start, just start to reorient so that that Your grace might be able to flow. Lord, let it be so. Amen.