

Lent 4.07

1. A foolish old man—that is what we have here. He is so foolish that he cannot see that his younger son has come home not because he regrets having hurt him and wants to say he is sorry. No, he has come home because he is hungry. Foolish old father, so blinded by his love for his younger son that he cannot even see that there is no love in his son's heart for him, that it is simply a question of self-interest.

2. Smart younger son! Clever younger son! Crafty younger son! He knows his father. He knows he can play him for all he's worth. And now he is back home, with shoes on again. No more swine! No more hunger!

3. Pitiable older son? A study in lovelessness. He begrudges everyone everything because it somehow detracts from his own happiness and sense of worth. He hates his brother; he hates his father for loving his brother. His heart has been frozen by a life of loveless duty. Never once has his father shown awareness of his life of dutiful service.

4. What would we say to this father? Wise up, we would tell him! Don't be a push over! Practice tough love with these heartless sons of yours! Don't accept the younger one back, and tell the older one to grow up!

5. But what does Jesus say to us? This is a parable. In and through this story I am telling you what God is like. He is like this foolish old father. Even though he is not so foolish as not to know that we are acting out of self-interest when we return to him, he does not reject us for our selfish motivations. Even when he knows that sometimes we serve him out of loveless sense of duty, he still loves us and hopes that his love will stir love within us so that we will move beyond our self-interests and sense of duty and come to love Him. Love will produce love. That is what our God hopes. I was going to say: That is what our God prays. But I don't suppose we can say that God prays. But we can say that He does hope for our return of love.

This is the Good News. God loves us.