

## Sermon

March 14, 2010

Text: Luke 15:11-32

I: Father, how can you do this? He takes your inheritance, which you should never have let him do in the first place, and then goes off to waste it all on wild parties and booze and prostitutes. And now he comes back here broke, and you just take him back like that! You even kill our fatted calf and now are throwing a party for him! A party! For him! How can you do that? You just forget about the terrible thing he did and receive him with open arms as if he hadn't done anything wrong! He doesn't deserve that! If anything, he deserves a good beating! You ought to pull out your belt and teach him a lesson! And then lock him in his room for a few weeks on a diet of nothing but bread and water! Or better yet, you shouldn't even take him back! At least not yet! Tell him to go out and earn the money he spent until he pays you back every last penny of what he took! God! I can't believe you're doing this! You never throw a party for me, and I've been the one that's always been right here working for you like a slave, night and day!

II: Son, how can you think like that?! How can you not receive your brother with open arms like me? Can't you see how much I've missed him? I haven't been able to sleep for months since he went away, worrying night and day about him, missing him, wondering if he's OK, wondering if something terrible has happened to him. Every day I've been looking down the road, waiting, hoping, praying to God that he would come home. He's my son! I love him! And now he's back! He's alive! I thought he was dead! When I finally saw him coming down that road, I couldn't believe it. My prayers had been answered! My son! My beloved son! To hug him and be able to hold him again in my arms, what joy! How could I react in any other way! How can you think I would hit him or beat him or not let him back in the house? He's everything to me! How can you be angry at me for celebrating and killing the fatted calf and throwing a party! I'm so happy! I've never been this happy in my life! How can you not be happy, too?! He's your brother! Don't you love him? You know everything I have is yours. Whenever you want to throw a party, you know you can do it. Come on! Rejoice with me and everyone else! Come into the party! Celebrate! Your brother is back! He's back!

I: No way! I'm not going in there! You expect me to *party* after what he's done? You want me just to smile and laugh like nothing happened?! Like he never took half of your life savings and threw it away on whores! You expect me to give him a hug and say, "Welcome home"?! If you're not going to beat some sense into him then maybe I will. Can't you see what's going on? If you just take him back like that, he's going to do it again! He's going to just keep being irresponsible. He's not going to change his ways, not when you take him back like that. Now he'll think he can get away with anything. Now that he's spent *his* part of the inheritance he'll probably start stealing *my* part from you. And what are you going to do—just keep forgiving him and letting him rob you blind and rob me blind as well? And then throw some more parties for him every time he steals more?! How can you be so naïve! You've got to teach him right and wrong, and make him pay for all the terrible things he's done! You've got to come down hard on him! So call the party off and send everyone home, and let me get my hands on him for a little while. I'll put my arms around him for you! I'll teach him a lesson or two if you won't!

II: No, son, you're wrong. You don't understand. Of course he did something terribly wrong. He hurt me like you have no idea. And of course he needs to change his ways and

grow up and become responsible and honest, and be a good person instead of the person he has been up till now. I want that just as much as you do. But that's not going to happen by me beating him and treating him like you want me to treat him, by rejecting him and refusing to talk to him and constantly trying to make him pay for what he did by rubbing it in his face. If I did that, I wouldn't have my son back. Instead, all I would have would be another servant, someone who would always be afraid of me and avoid me, maybe even staying as far away from me as he could. What kind of relationship would that be? Would you call that having a son? I love him! I want to be a father to him and rejoice with him when he's happy and cry with him when he's sad. I want to be close to him and I want him to want to be close to me. I don't want him to be afraid of me. I don't want him to be another servant, a slave who serves me out of fear, or just because he wants to get something out of me or try to manipulate me. I love him and I want him to love me too, just like I love you and want you to love me, and to love him as well! Now, please, come on in and welcome him, I beg you!

I: Welcome him?! No way! There's no way I'm going in there! No way I'm going to take him back like that! That would be to approve of what he did. That would be to say that it was OK, that it doesn't matter. But it *does* matter. He's got to learn his lesson.

II: Yes, he's got to learn his lesson. And I'm convinced that he has. Yes, there are times when he needs to be scolded and disciplined, when limits have to be set. There are times when he needs to be told that it's totally unacceptable for him to do certain things and that it's got to stop. But not right now. He knows what he did was terribly wrong. He knows how much he hurt me. And he looked so broken when he came back, I don't think he's ever going to be the same person he was before. But even if he does keep doing terrible things, he's my son and he always will be. I will take him back. Do I want him to change? Of course I want him to change, for his own good. But the only way he will ever really change deep down inside is not by me treating him like you want me to treat him. I don't want a slave who just obeys me. I want a son who loves me. And if you want to have a brother who will be a friend to you for the rest of your life, you have got to accept him back with open arms like me. The only way he will ever be the son I want him to be and love me as his father is by showing him how much I love him. And while there are times when loving him means not putting up with his bad behavior, right now it means celebrating his return with a fatted calf. Right now what he needs is a father and a brother telling him how overjoyed they are that he's back. He needs to know that in spite of the terrible thing he did, you and I love him and always will, no matter what. And because I love him, I want to throw a party for him just like I threw my arms around him when I saw him. He's my son! My dear son! And he's home again! Now are you coming in to celebrate that I have my son back and you have your brother back, or not?