

SERMON by SAXON B. GRAHAM; LUKE 15:11-32; 7.12.09

When we decided assignments for this worship service, I was chosen by the advisors and myself to talk to all of you this morning. I was delegated to also pick a scripture reading that I feel “speaks” to me. I chose Luke’s parable of the lost son for two reasons: because of the connection between the lost son and his father, and my dad and me; and the significance of all of us here today as the “older son” of the equation.

I am an only child in my family of 3, so all of the pros and cons of being an only child are there. I got all the toys. I got all the hand-me-downs from my older cousins. When I threw a tantrum I either got what I wanted or I was spanked all the way from Toys R Us to the car, all the way home, then into a time out where I got Tabasco sauce on my tongue. (That was a joke). I didn’t have a sibling to blame it on either.

The one thing that usually is constant in a nuclear family with one child like mine is that the child has a bond with the parent of the same gender. For me, obviously, my Dad and I were pretty close, and we’re even closer now. We literally do everything together, from fly fishing to talking about the stock market. We’re always on the same page with each others thoughts, actions, and emotions.

However, like the parable of the lost son, we’ve had some pretty big bumps in our road to make it even. We’ve had our fights. We’ve had our mishaps. And the parable of the lost son is a kind of ironic comparison to our families, since we ourselves had a revelation of our own sort. We had an incident similar to the lost son and his father, in March 2008, when we were both on edge with each other throughout the whole process. Lucky for us, this one event where we had to look deep into ourselves and each other brought us closer than ever before. Before I was his son and he was my father. Afterwards we were still father and son, but we were able to look at each other in the eyes and admit that we were grown men who made mistakes, and that we can both forgive each other even if it means the alienation of others. There’s a song titled “Forever Begins” by the hip hop artist Common, in which he says,

“Son, I bet you feel like you and I have been there forever,
I see you, my world tears, true hope comes in the protection
And admiration of the child and that’s forever.”

Back when I was five or six I thought my Dad was ten feet tall, nothing could touch him, and he couldn’t have any type of flaw that I could see. Now I look at him as I would myself, just another person in the existence that we as human beings call “life”. No matter what goes wrong in our own separate lives, we can look each other straight in the eye and say “I love you. I trust you, and even after I’m in the ground I’ll always be there for you.” And that’s not as father and son. That is true compassion that can only be achieved by two people who have ultimate respect for one another. No matter what could possibly happen, my Dad and I and the father and son in my story can always share a common bond that is never broken between a dad and his little boy.

The second part of my talk today deals with the notion that we as a people tend to have an opinion or point of view like that of the older son. What I mean is that all of us here, at one time in our life, have taken for granted what Luke calls “everything that is mine is yours”. Here in Buffalo we have what we think are necessities like a grocery store or a gas station literally 2 or 3 minutes from our homes, while people in Western Maine have one of the most close-knit communities I have ever come across. Yet for some reason we all take for granted these little things that can make so much difference to a day, an hour, or even a minute of our time. We are compared to the older son in the fact that every time we see some little thing we either want or feel like we need to have, we have a yearning to grab that item or emotion and put it in a little safe place where nobody can touch it. Unfortunately that’s not how it works. We all have our little fantasies about what we wanted to be when we grew up. One day however we all have to go back to the fact that there is some place in the world for each and every one of us. Coming to Maine has changed my way of seeing how everyday jobs and tasks are completed. It has shown me how chopping firewood for heat is more satisfying than turning on a thermostat and calling it a day.

What I want you to take away from my sermon is this: Whenever you’re out and about with your family and friends, take a look around you. God is always with us throughout everything in nature, from the trees that calm our spirit, to the sight and sound of lightning and thunder that invigorates us, to people like my father who make you better people through their actions and their kind words. Be true to your friends and yourself. Always ask questions and ask for advice, because you’ll never know when you’ll get a sense of love and friendship from someone you trust. Amen.