

Coram Deo
Soli Deo Gloria, Soli Deo Gracia, Soli Scriptura
Agnus Dei, Qui Tollis Peccata Mundi
Deo Volente

Sermon Preach at Stouffville United Church

By the Rev. Dr. John S. Niles MSM

“You’re So Right that You’re Wrong”

May 08, 2022

Luke 15:11-32

Sometimes you win, sometimes you learn
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aEuqMlv02aw>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hgwSbYazftg>

What did your mother teach you? This is what one son has written:

- My Mother taught me *Logic* - "If you fall off that swing and break your neck, you can't go to the store with me," as well as, "If everyone else jumped off a cliff would you do it too?"
- My Mother taught me *medicine* - "If you don't stop crossing your eyes, they're going to freeze that way."
- My Mother taught me *to think ahead* – "If you don't pass your spelling test, you'll never get a good job!"
- My Mother taught me *to meet a challenge* - "What were you thinking? Answer me when I talk to you... Don't talk back to me!"
- My Mother taught me humor – "When that lawn mower cuts off your toes, don't come running to me."
- My Mother taught me how *to become an adult* – "If you don't eat your vegetables, you'll never grow up."
- My mother taught me about *genetics* – "You are just like your father!"
- My mother taught me about *my roots* - "Do you think you were born in a barn?"
- My mother taught me about the *wisdom of age* - "When you get to be my age, you will understand," or, "I will explain it all when you get older."
- My mother taught me about *anticipation* – "Just wait until your father gets home."
- My mother taught me about *receiving* – "You are going to get it when I get you home."
- And the all time favorite thing my mother taught me is *justice* - "One day you will have kids, and I hope they turn out just like you. Then you'll see what it's like! I can't wait!"

We are all born of mothers. We are all indebted to our mothers.

An Eight-year-old Mary wrote her mother a note for Mother's Day. "Dear Mother, here is the box of candy I bought you for Mother's Day. It is very good candy. I know, because I already ate three pieces."

Eight-year-old Carol also wrote her mother said, "Dear mother, here are two aspirins. Have a happy mother's day."

For years I have been reading the parable of the Prodigal Son and thinking that it was only the younger brother. I was so right I was wrong. That was the obvious conclusion. It is the conclusion of most theologians so I'm in good company; but the fact is a parable is a parable because it is meant to make you think. The obvious answer may still be right, but it is for the parable it may be the wrong one. The prodigal son in question was in fact the elder brother - the good one. The one that was so right that he was wrong.

You know these type of people - the elder brother and sisters - the people who have nothing good to say; those who always look at the glass half empty; those who are negative and judgmental; those who think themselves righteous because they do not do what others do; those who are presented with an idea that would help in a given situation and only want to poke holes it and show what's wrong and how it won't work; the ones who miss out on the party because they are pouting about petty things.

A very critical, negative barber never had a good thing to say about anyone or anything. A salesman came into his shop one day and told him he was going on a business trip to Rome. The barber asked, "What airline will you be taking and what hotel will you be staying at?" When the salesman told him the barber criticized the airline for being undependable and the hotel for having horrible service. "You'd be better off to stay at home," he advised. "But I expect to close a really big business deal and then I'm going to see the Pope." The barber continued, "Don't count on seeing the Pope. He only sees important people. And you're certainly not that!"

Several weeks later the salesman returned and stopped by the barbershop. "How was your trip?" asked the barber. "It was wonderful," the salesman said. "The airline was great, the hotel was excellent." "Did you see the Pope? What happened?" The salesman said, "Oh yes! I even bent down and kissed his ring." "No kidding. What did he say?" asked the barber? "Well, he placed his hand on my head and said to me, "My son, where did you ever get such a lousy haircut?"

I

The older brother was so right that he was wrong! He didn't see that his **judgments were judged.** *25 "Meanwhile, the older son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. 26 So he called one of the servants and asked him what was going on. 27 'Your brother has come home,' he replied, 'and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound. 28 "The older brother became angry and refused to go in..."*

Most of us are in such a habit of judging and criticizing others that we don't think about how it affects others or what it says about us.

A women I knew many years ago would use Scripture to push people about judging and condemning them for one thing or another. She decided one day to make her point about her judgment about others and to declare to everyone what was going to

happen to them. The sign was mounted on the front of her car. The sign read, "Prepare to meet Thy God!"

I always thought it kind of her to warn people that she was a rotten driver. You see, our judgments are judged.

Someone once asked Robert Frost, "Mr. Frost, what does that poem mean?" He replied, "What is it that you want me to do, say it again only worse?" Someone ask Pavlova, "What does that dance mean?" and she replied, "If I could have told you, I wouldn't have danced it!"

I'm reminded of the guy who was being shown through an art gallery and who moved from room to room and from picture to picture commenting, "I don't see much in that!" The attendant who accompanied the group listened to her until he could stand it no longer; and said, "Sir, the pictures have already been judged as masterpieces. They are not the ones on trial here. You are."

There is a wonderful story told of Joseph Parker of London's City Temple, and a prince of preachers. One Sunday morning Parker told his congregation that before the service someone had written him an intimidating note and slipped it under his study door. It informed him that the writer would be present at worship and intended to make a critical assessment of the sermon, a philosophical analysis of every sentence the preacher uttered. Parker went on to say that at first reading the note filled him with anxiety. Who could stand such scrutiny? He had taken the trouble to read it twice, however, and lost most of his concern when he noticed that the writer spelled "philosophical" with an "f".

I always think of this, when I receive such comments or letters.

Or I think of the literary critic who wrote in the Edinburgh Review, declaring adamantly, "The poem simply will not do!" The poem that "would not do" was William Wordsworth's "The Excursion"

The Elder brothers judgments gave him away.

He was judged by his judgments. *"...every one of you who passes judgment are without excuse, for in that you judge another, you condemn yourself..." The Scripture says.*

II

The older brother was so right that he was wrong! He didn't see that his judgments are judged or even that, the most important **judgement was born of love.**

That judgement was offered by a parent who loved both his children. **31** *"My son,' the father said, 'you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. 32 But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.'"*

Contained within these kind words of the Father was a rebuke and rebuttal of the elder brothers view but it was also a recognize of how much he loved him.

The passage reads that the father said, "my son". In fact the translation means, my child – which denotes not only intimacy but also an awareness that the one the father is talking too lacks any understanding at all. He just doesn't get it. The father was saying, "Don't you get it. It's your brother! I thought he was dead! You are right he messed up but he, like you are still my child. He was missing the grace and love that was offered because of his bitterness.

The American poet, Robert Frost, one day found himself wandering through a cemetery, looking at tombstones. As he strolled he read the inscriptions and the dates and the engraved words that encapsulated the life of the person. Born when, died where, and a few words to sum up a lifetime; words chosen by others to remember a friend or a loved one. Someone's determined judgment on a life. Frost asked himself what he would have chosen for himself--how he would have judged his life or how he would have liked to have been judged.

It is a good question? By what words would you wish to be remembered? Malcolm Muggeridge has on his these words: "He wrote well" When others thought about it, they determined they could not have come up with a better judgment of his life. St. Augustine called himself "a vendor of words". Robertson Davies, has a Welsh motto "A Man should listen to the promptings of his heart." And his father Rupert Davies has "He who strives hardest shall conquer". And both listened and conquered. But Robert Frost had on his tombstone, "He had a lovers quarrel with the world." And he did. His quarrel, and it was a quarrel was great, yet it was a lovers quarrel. His judgment of the world was done in love.

We have always had lovers quarrels, yet more often than not, they are only with ourselves. These quarrels are never to harsh. We say things like, "how foolish could I have been." But we never say, "I was a fool" We make excuses for ourselves; "I wasn't myself when I did that." We give ourselves the benefit of the doubt. But this is not that case with others though. Others we just quarrel with. We judge them as fools, and we do not give them the benefit of the doubt, as we do ourselves.

I remember a story on "Dateline" about "Road Rage". It told of how people get so angry at others while driving that they do very dangerous and deadly things. Yet, we forget that we drive no differently. Yet, we judge ourselves by a different standard. You know what we do when we drive. We signal left and turn right. or we turn without making any signal at all. Or we go through a red light. or we get into the wrong stream of traffic and hold everybody up until some kind heart lets us back into the right lane. When these things happen we say that they are the unusual mistakes of an otherwise excellent driver. But let anyone else do the same thing, and watch out!

Now, that was what Jesus was saying in this parable to the elder brother. Let you judgement be tempered with love.

Demand what you deserve, and you may never discover how much you missed.
Claim your rights and you may never learn how wrong you were.
Insist on justice and you will never know the mercy that was offered you.
Seize what is yours and you will never possess what is His.
For God's only reason for loving you is that He loves you!

You think about that. Amen.