

Easter Sunday – April 9, 2023
Text: Luke 15:11-32
Theme: Perfection Welcomes Failure

¹¹ And he said, “There was a man who had two sons. ¹² And the younger of them said to his father, ‘Father, give me the share of property that is coming to me.’ And he divided his property between them. ¹³ Not many days later, the younger son gathered all he had and took a journey into a far country, and there he squandered his property in reckless living. ¹⁴ And when he had spent everything, a severe famine arose in that country, and he began to be in need. ¹⁵ So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed pigs. ¹⁶ And he was longing to be fed with the pods that the pigs ate, and no one gave him anything.

¹⁷ “But when he came to himself, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired servants have more than enough bread, but I perish here with hunger! ¹⁸ I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. ¹⁹ I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants.’” ²⁰ And he arose and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. ²¹ And the son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’ ²² But the father said to his servants, ‘Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet. ²³ And bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate. ²⁴ For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.’ And they began to celebrate.

²⁵ “Now his older son was in the field, and as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing. ²⁶ And he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant. ²⁷ And he said to him, ‘Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fattened calf, because he has received him back safe and sound.’ ²⁸ But he was angry and refused to go in. His father came out and entreated him, ²⁹ but he answered his father, ‘Look, these many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command, yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might celebrate with my friends. ³⁰ But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him!’ ³¹ And he said to him, ‘Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. ³² It was fitting to celebrate and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found.’”

The sermon text for today is the parable of the prodigal son. All during the midweek services of Lent we have been looking at a book by Dr. Daniel Paavola, Patience & Perfection. Dr. Paavola believes that all of Scripture can be divided into 7 themes, and we have discussed 6 of those themes over the course of the last 6 weeks. If

you had to miss a Wednesday service, all the sermons are archived on the website. Today, we look at the final theme, "Perfection Welcomes Failure."

It's kind of a funny thing to be talking about on Easter Sunday. We're used to sermons about empty tombs, exasperated angels and shocked women but today, we're going to talk about the Prodigal Son and failure. We love Easter because it is a showcase of God's perfection. Everything He had promised came together perfectly and Jesus blasted out of the tomb just as He said He would. It is an amazing day. But, as we have learned during our midweek sermons, immediate perfection is not the norm for us and God. While we are made holy and perfect at the moment of our baptism, we all have that old sinful nature still working within us and working against God. Patient relationship is the way God overcomes that sinful nature, not instant perfection. Take the prodigal son for example.

What was Jesus telling us with this parable? We all identify with it at one level or another don't we? Most of us have had times in our lives when we failed like the prodigal son, wandering away from God and pursuing paths that seemed okay at the time but turned out to be mostly unrighteous and, all in all, pretty disappointing. And if you haven't ever been the prodigal son, then

you have failed by being the older brother. You were the one who did everything right and resented everyone else for doing what they wanted instead of what was expected. The older brother thought he should have received some kind of special recognition for doing what he was called to do. Jesus' point is that God could have just zapped the two brothers and made them perfect. He could have made the prodigal more righteous and the older less self-righteous and the problem would be solved! The father in the parable could have cut the prodigal off from the inheritance and let the older brother have everything, problem solved! No more waiting around for the prodigal to get his life together, and the older son wouldn't get all bent out of shape for welcoming the prodigal back. But that is not how the father in the story did it and that is not how our Father in heaven does it with us either.

He is very patient with us, and He patiently teaches us through our failures and grows us into the perfection He has made for us. On this day, Jesus rose from the dead thus proving that the grave could not hold him and therefore, it cannot hold any of us either. On the last day, we will receive the inheritance that Jesus won for us on the cross and proved that he had won for us when he burst out of the tomb on Easter morning. Until the last day, our Father patiently

works with us. Maybe you have wandered off in the past, or maybe you are wandering off right now. Maybe you have found yourself eating with the pigs. Or, maybe you are huffing and puffing about doing your duty as though God should be privileged for you to do your job. Either way, God is working on you and growing you, lifting you out of failure to have a stronger relationship with Him.

Perfection welcomes failure. God knows that every failure we experience is an opportunity to learn and grow. Dr. Paavola encourages us to be a boomerang, not a spear. A spear only flies one direction in a relatively straight line from where it is thrown. That might be a good model for a footrace. You really only want to go one direction and you want to go as fast as you can. It is not a very good model for a relationship with God. With God, we are boomerangs, flying out for a while, but always returning to Him to maintain the correct course. I think of training a child. When you are teaching a child a new skill, you don't just show him once and say "Ok kid, you're on your own. Hope you were paying attention when I showed you how to cross the street. If you get run over it's your problem." No, you show him multiple times. You let him try and fail, and then you rescue him and show him again, let him try and

fail not quite as badly as the last time and then, show him again and so on. Failure helps him grow towards perfection.

Jesus did not rise from the dead on this day and yell from the tomb – “Ok you knuckleheads! Hope you were paying attention!” He stayed on earth for 40 days, walking and talking with His apostles who would become the Church’s first pastors. He forgave Peter and reinstated him. He showed himself to over 500 witnesses so that the fact of His resurrection would never be in question. And He didn’t stop there. As He ascended into Heaven He promised, “And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” And so He is, picking us up and dusting us off every time we fail and helping us to continue growing until the day of our perfection comes and we enter into paradise with Him where we will live in perfection forever. We are all glorious failures redeemed by our Lord Jesus Christ! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!