

<sup>11</sup> Then Jesus said, "There was a man who had two sons. <sup>12</sup> The younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of the property that will belong to me.' So he divided his property between them. <sup>13</sup> A few days later the younger son gathered all he had and traveled to a distant country, and there he squandered his property in dissolute living. <sup>14</sup> When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that country, and he began to be in need. <sup>15</sup> So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs. <sup>16</sup> He would gladly have filled himself with the pods that the pigs were eating; and no one gave him anything. <sup>17</sup> But when he came to himself he said, 'How many of my father's hired hands have bread enough and to spare, but here I am dying of hunger! <sup>18</sup> I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; <sup>19</sup> I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands.'" <sup>20</sup> So he set off and went to his father. But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him. <sup>21</sup> Then the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' <sup>22</sup> But the father said to his slaves, 'Quickly, bring out a robe—the best one—and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. <sup>23</sup> And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; <sup>24</sup> for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!' And they began to celebrate. <sup>25</sup> "Now his elder son was in the field; and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. <sup>26</sup> He called one of the slaves and asked what was going on. <sup>27</sup> He replied, 'Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has got him back safe and sound.' <sup>28</sup> Then he became angry and refused to go in. His father came out and began to plead with him. <sup>29</sup> But he answered his father, 'Listen! For all these years I have been working like a slave for you, and I have never disobeyed your command; yet you have never given me even a young goat so that I might celebrate with my friends. <sup>30</sup> But when this son of yours came back, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fatted calf for him!' <sup>31</sup> Then the father <sup>32</sup> said to him, 'Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. <sup>32</sup> But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found.'" Luke 15:11-23 NRSV

When I preached on this parable of Jesus last Sunday(March 10), the title of my sermon was "Can we really live by Grace?" At first glance at the parable we might say a resounding yes ,since the forgiveness and restoration of the younger son is really encouraging to all of us. My suspicion is that while all of us may not have gone to the extremes that the younger son used to "blow" his early inheritance, we may have at one time moved far away from God in our lifestyles, and experienced God's grace restoring us to a better place spiritually. I know I personally have experienced God's generous grace and forgiveness lavished on me many times. John Newton sums up God's generous grace to us in the familiar hymn "Amazing Grace" when he refers to this parable in the lyric " *I once was lost, but now am found, was blind but now I see .*" The challenge for though comes in the response of the older brother. He becomes indignant and rigid over the generous action of his father to his brother. He has been the "good son", and he has done all his father has asked. He has played by the rules. It seems he has "earned" all his "brownie points". SO why can't his father appreciate that??? The truth is the older son is all "duty" and no "grace". There is no hint the older son ever experienced any grace whatsoever! So why lavish such grace upon a good for nothing younger brother?

The challenge of this parable at it was for those in the religious establishment of Jesus day and age is to do less judging and let God's grace, forgiveness, and love. IF everyone sensed that we truly lived by and celebrated God's grace in our churches, many would come because forgiveness .love and hope could easily be found!

*When you get to heaven, you will likely view  
 Many folks whose presence there  
 Will be a shock to you  
 But keep very quiet,  
 Do not even stare,  
 Doubtless there'll be many folks  
 Surprised to see you there. Unknown*

Pr. John Van Haneghan