

Father/Son #1

Is God Ticked Off At Me?

February 7, 2010 - Communion Sunday

(Sermon notes are a transcript from the sermon with only minor editing, retaining the conversational style.)

Max Lucado tells a story of a young college football receiver who dropped a key pass. This is what he writes in his book entitled, Fearless,

Noble Doss dropped the ball. One ball. One pass. One mistake. In 1941 he let one fall. And it's haunted him ever since. It cost us a national championship, he said. The University of Texas football team was ranked number one in the nation. Hoping for an undefeated season and a position in the Ross Bowl, they played rival Baylor University. With a 7-0 lead in the third quarter, the Longhorn quarterback launched a deep pass to the wide-open Doss. The only thing I had between me and the goal, he recalled, was the twenty yards of grass. The throw was on target. Longhorn fans rose to their feet. The sure-handed Doss spotted the ball and reached out, but it slipped through. Baylor rallied and tied the score with seconds to play. Texas lost their top ranking and, consequently, their chance at the Rose Bowl. I think about that play every day, Doss admits.

Here is the irony of this whole thing. Doss went on to live a very successful life. Happily married for more than six decades. A father, Grandfather. He served in the navy during World War II. He appeared in the cover of *Life* magazine with his Texas teammates. He won two NFL titles with the Philadelphia Eagles. The Texas High School Football Hall of Fame and the Longhorn Hall of Honor include his name.

Years later, upon meeting a new Long-Horn head coach, Doss told him about the bobbled ball. It had been fifty years since the game, but he wept as he spoke.

Memories of dropped passes fade slowly, don't they?

Seven deadly sins, Pride, envy, greed, anger, sloth, gluttony, lust and I have come to realize that these sins are more of my DNA than I ever realized. Sitting in the hospital you have a lot of time to think. Memories of the times I dropped the ball came unexpectedly back into my mind. Sins that I have committed that I would be embarrassed to tell you became real again. Living rent free in my mind.

I know, I've confessed those sins. I have brought them to the cross. At moments when I least expect it, Satan likes to remind me that I dropped that one key pass. I've failed miserably.

Many of us today would gladly swap our blunders for Doss's. If only we'd merely dropped a pass. If only we'd merely disappointed a football squad.

The number of times that I've talked to people who talked about their dropped passes, moments of anger, pride, failed relationships, etc. the one question that keeps coming up is, **Can God ever forgive me?**

God's well of grace surely must have a bottom to it, we reason. Can't a person request forgiveness only so many times, our common sense would say to us. Cash in too many mercy checks, and sooner or later one is going to bounce. At any bank they are quick to remind you that you have overdrawn on your checking account.

When I feel vulnerable, the devil whispers in my ear that God's grace has limited funds. The account is empty. God has locked the door to this throne room. Pound all you want; pray all you want. No access to God. We look at all the dropped passes and come to the conclusion that *I feel like such a failure/loser.*

Today, I want to say to you, even though we all have failed and dropped the ball, and have fallen short of God's glory, Christ came so that we would not be failures. God came for people like me and like you.

Here is the struggle, our hearts are so **prone to wander**. That is why I need constant reminders like communion, Church, small group, Bible reading, prayer, etc. etc. that I am a person in dire need of God's grace, forgiveness, and strength. I come to church, I worship, pray, study his Word. I feel good, in touch with God, but come Monday morning, I put God on the back burner.

Lady/My dog.

We have a dog that likes to wander. Lady was at the door at the Activity Building. She looked up at Fonda and said, *Please let me out. I promise I won't run away. I promise I 'll be good. I'll come back in two minutes. I just need to go to the bathroom. I am always an obedient dog.*

Fonda, having a heart of mercy heart, lets Lady out. No sooner than she let the dog out Lady darted off.

Hours later I get this phone call from Bob S. *Is your dog missing? I think I saw her. I tried to call her but she ran the other way.*

I get in the car and I'm driving around the neighborhood behind Bob's house, *Here Lady, here Lady.*

I was just about to turn right on Main Street and head home, saying to myself, *This is hopeless.* I then heard a bark. It wasn't Lady's bark, but another dog's bark. I took a left and pulled into the parking lot in the Bookstore. This was some weeks ago, and on that particular day it was cold, wet, sleet, muddy and I pulled in this muddy parking lot and I got out of the car, *Here Lady.* No answer. I got back into the car and just ready to pull out and guess who is standing there. Lady. Hungry, cold, wet, pathetic looking.

I will confess to you that I had mixed feelings. If there would have been a 10 year old boy standing there staring at Lady, I would have said, *Son, this is your lucky day. How would you like to have a wonderful, obedient dog? She is all yours. Free. Just don't tell your parents where you got her.*

Why is that my heart is so prone to wander, even after I have tasted the wonderful gift of God's forgiveness and grace? Like Lady, I run off and only when I am hungry, tired, lonely, hurting, beat up emotionally, that I come back to God with my tail between my legs.

Unlike me, God is willing and wanting to accept us back with open arms. I was ready to give Lady away in a heartbeat. Aren't you glad that God isn't fickle. God will always love us and be there waiting for us.

Prodigal's Son.

1. Radical Rejection:

One day the son comes to the father and says, *Show me the money.*

I want my share of the estate. He doesn't even have the respect to wait until his father dies. He wants the money now. The eldest would get two-thirds; the younger one third. Amazingly the father complies without question. The father gives the young son his share of the estate and he gathers together all he received, turns it into cash, and leaves to some far distant country. (I wonder what the exchange rate was?)

This is not a desire to do some traveling, but it is the desire to get out from the restraints and constraints of living within the family home. This is about a drastic cutting loose from the way of thinking and living, and being, and acting, that has been handed to him by his father. This is not just disrespect, but **betrayal of family values and community.**

The son might have said, *"Father I want to be independent. You must give me my freedom. I can't go on living like this with all the restrictions you place on me. I'm big and grown up now; quit treating me like a child. I want my liberty. I feel as if I am chained like galley slaves to oars. I long for air; I need my space, I want my freedom."*

2. Licentious Living

RSV: *they entice with licentious passions of the flesh men who have barely escaped from those who live in error.* II Peter 2:18

Definition: Licentious

1. sexually unrestrained; lewd.
2. unrestrained by law or general morality; lawless; immoral.
3. going beyond customary or proper bounds or limits; disregarding rules.

The son takes off. 15 minutes of fame. His money runs out.

What started out as an arrogant self sufficient young man, he is now beaten down to the point of realizing that the pigs eat better at his father's house than what he is eating now.

He finally had enough common sense to swallow his pride and said, *I want to go home.*

Here is a man for all practical purposes has been homeless. At best marginal. He smells, he's hungry, he's weather beaten. He's physically, emotionally, and spiritually beat up.

Back at home, I'm sure it was the talk of the town when the young son left. People saying, *Can you believe that young son took one third of his inheritance. I bet he's long gone. He'll never come back.*

After a week, people in the town went about their business, completely forgetting about him.

For the father, it was a different story. Days, weeks, months, perhaps years went by, waiting for his son to return. Then one day, out of the blue, one of his servants comes running in and says, *Master, I think that is your son way off in the distance who is coming home.*

Now think for a moment the ~~distance~~ between the son and the father at that instance.

* Obviously there was a physical distance. We don't know how far, but mile, two miles. Long way off.

* Think of the emotional distances that existed between the father and son. All the hurt. All the pain. All anguish. All the lying. All the manipulation. All that emotional baggage that existed between the two of them. What was the Father's response? . He goes out running after him.

And so the father again breaks the pattern of a mid-eastern patriarch. He takes the bottom of his robes in hand and runs out to meet his pig-herding son in the street. He grabs him in his arms and kisses him.

He does this before his long lost son is able to confess even one of his sins.

The father does not demonstrate his love to his son in **response** to his son's confession. No, but out of his own compassion, he empties himself, assumes the form of a servant and runs to be reconciled to his estranged son.

Mid-Easterner's do not run in their robes. Dignified men do not run. An ancient proverb says, *"A man's manner of walking tells you what he is."* In Eastern eyes, it is so terribly undignified for an elderly man to run. Even Aristotle wrote, *"Great men never run in public."*

The father had such compassion that he does not wait for his son to make his way into the village. He does not wait even for his son to speak. Rather the father assumes a humiliating posture for his child. He kisses his dirty, smelly son who hadn't had a shower for months; he hugged his son in rags. The father speaks no words there at the edge of the village. He substitutes kisses for words. His hands and arms for speeches.

This arrogant, prideful son finally had enough sense in him and said, *I need to come back to my father, Just As I Am.*

Maybe that is what some of you need to do this morning is to come to this table, Just as you are. Stop trying to clean up your act. Get your head out of the sand, and say to yourself, *I am hurting big time. I know that I dropped the ball big time. I need to come just as I am.*

An elderly man asked **Charlotte Elliott** if she were a Christian; she felt insulted, and told him to mind his own affairs. But after the man left, she could not get the question off her mind, and she went back to ask the man how to find Christ. He told her to come just as she was. She did, and out of that wrote the beautiful song, *"Just As I Am.* This is what one of the verses reads:

*Just as I am, tho' tossed about
With many a conflict, many a doubt,
Fightings and fears within, without,
O Lamb of God, I come, I come.*

When Lady was ready to come home, I wasn't quite sure I wanted her back, even though she came just as she was, dirty, muddy, etc. When you are ready to come home, God runs out to greet you.

After doing this series of the Seven Deadly Sins, You might have said, *My past is not all the pretty. In fact it's pretty ugly.* Stuff that you are not proud of keep coming to the surface of your mind. Satan keeps reminding you how you have dropped the key pass big time.

I just have one thing to say to that. *It's time to kill the rooster. It's time to take that ax, sharpen it, and*

grab that rooster by the neck. If Satan is living rent free in your mind, it's time to kill the rooster.

When **Booker T. Washington** was young, every morning he and his family and the whole plantation was awakened by the crow of a rooster. Long before daybreak the unwelcome noise would fill the sod shanties, reminding Washington and his fellow workers to crawl out of bed and leave for the cotton fields. The rooster's crow came to symbolize their dictated life of long days and backbreaking labor.

But then came the Emancipation Proclamation. Abraham Lincoln pronounced freedom for slaves.

The first morning afterward, young Booker was awakened by the rooster again. Only this time his mother was chasing it around the barnyard with an ax. The Washington family fried and ate their alarm clock for lunch. Their first act of freedom was to silence the reminder of slavery.

When we come to this table we are to come just as we are. No pretense, pretension, no feigning. We are to come with an attitude, that this is a new day. Breaking of the dawn.

William Willimon tells this story:

Annie Dillard, the great American writer, tells in her book about her life growing up in Pittsburgh. She was a smart young woman. By the age of fifteen she'd read through all the books in the Carnegie Branch of the Pittsburgh Library near her home. And reading those books she decided that all this religion stuff is bunk and God doesn't really exist. So she took it upon herself at age fifteen to show up at Shadyside Presbyterian Church and she said to her aging pastor, *"I want my name off the roll. I don't believe in God anymore."*

The pastor said, *"Okay."*

Annie Dillard said, *"You're not going to try to argue me out of it?"*

And he said, *"No, no, no. You're too smart for me. There's no way I could argue you back in."*

So she said, *"I want my name off the roll."*

He said, *"It's off the roll."*

She said, *"Okay."* She walked out of the minister's office and on her way down the hall she heard him mutter to himself out loud, *"She'll be back!"*

She wheeled around, went back into the office and she said, *"What did I hear you say?"*

He said, *"Oh, I said I presumed that you'll probably be back."*

And she said, *"Look, this is my life. I live my life like I want to live my life. I'm not coming back!"*

Well, Annie Dillard years later wrote in her life story, *"As I write this I'm 48 years old and I'm back."* God never leaves us alone.

God is not the one who sets up the rules and puts out the standards and says, *"Now here's the bar. Chin up to it if you can."* No, God is the one that seeks and searches and finds.

Jesus says there in Luke 15 that if just one of these sinners gets caught in the great dragnet of God's grace, heaven just goes crazy. Thank God that we not only have a God that loves us as we are, but seeks us out where we are.

The purpose of posting this sermon is for personal Bible study and resource material for pastors:

Resources:

Lacado, Max. [Fearless.](#)

VanPopta, J.L. ["Prodigal Son"](#)

[Spindleworks.com](#)

Willimon, William: ["God on the Prowl"](#)

[30 Good Minutes.org](#)