

Join the party!

Luke 15:1-32

March 14, 2010

(Video retelling of Jesus' story of the two brothers:
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rym_mRVJv-8)

You know, this is so difficult for me to understand ...

Is it difficult for you to understand?

Show me your happy faces! Now show me your sad faces! What makes you sad? What makes you happy?

So when the Lord makes the sun shine, you are happy? If the Lord made the sun shine in Minnesota, would you be happy? Does it make you happy to know that God forgives you all your sins? Does it make you happy to know that God forgives the person that hurt you all his sins?

The Pharisees weren't happy! The Pharisees! They're always the bad guys. But, really, we should give them a break. They're not so different from you and me, good people trying to do the right thing, impatient with other people who can't seem to get their lives together, impatient with the perennial losers who make us pick up the pieces after them, threatened by people who want to tell us we're going in the wrong direction, threatened by the rabble rousers who want to upset the status quo.

So the Pharisees weren't happy.

This man welcomes outcasts and even eats with them!

Jesus has already confronted the threat of fear and the threat of despair on the road to Jerusalem. Now he faces ... the grumblers. Grrrr ...

Come on in, all of you. You are all welcome ...

Grrrr ...

Your sins are forgiven ...

Grrrr ...

I will help you, even if it is the Sabbath ...

Grrrr ...

I have come to bring good news to the poor ...

Grrrr ...

Again and again, it's a broken record. Grrrr ... Jesus is just trying to do some good, and they keep grumbling. They keep complaining.

What good does grumbling do? None at all! What does grumbling accomplish? Nothing!

Actually grumbling does accomplish something. Grumbling dampens enthusiasm, kills the mood, drains energy. Grumbling is a distraction, diverting time and attention away from more worthy pursuits. Grumbling is just not fun! And grumbling presents a real threat to the vital work of the gospel. I am so glad that grumbling is never a problem among us!

Jesus answers the grumblers by telling them a story, actually three stories. Notice what he does. Instead of chiding them or scolding them, he tells them a series of stories to show them another way.

And what is the common theme of all three stories? What is the common punchline? A party! A great celebration! Great joy in heaven over each and every sinner who repents. Great joy in heaven over each and every lost soul who comes back home.

But the Pharisees don't want to join the party. Why not? Because, like the older son in Jesus' story, they don't like who's invited! The party, the celebration, God's banquet, should be for respectable people, like us.

Whoever said the gospel was about rewarding people for being respectable?

What is the gospel about? It's about making broken people whole! It's about setting people free from the burdens that weigh them down, setting people free from the chains that bind them, setting people free from the sins that pull their lives apart. The gospel is about redemption, pulling people back from the brink of disaster. The gospel is about transformation, turning prideful and self-centered and weak-willed and indifferent people into people ... like Jesus. The gospel is about salvation, about saving people's lives, about saving the life of the world.

And when the gospel works, when that good news touches a broken heart, turns around a wandering soul, puts a stumbling man back on his feet, gives new hope to a despairing woman, why, that's cause for celebration! That's good reason to throw a party, don't you think?

So, come on! Don't stay outside sulking! Join the party! Let your hair down! Dance a little! Dance a lot! What did we sing this morning?

Joyful, joyful, we adore you, God of glory, Lord of love ...

Sometimes, in some places -- in this time, in this place, for the sake of the gospel -- it's not about being respectable. So raise your arms! Clap your hands! Dance in the aisles! Laugh! Sing! Have fun! Celebrate!

Or is that too difficult for you to understand?