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The Message: Wake up and Smell the Pigs!

Wake up and smell the roses!

That's the advice one would give the Prodigal son when he headed off to squander his inheritance, leaving behind his loving family, well, a loving father at any rate, and an older brother who was .. well, an older brother.

He thought he would have a bit of fun.

But one day, he woke up.

In the case of the Prodigal, of course, it wasn't roses but the smell of the pigs. If you haven't caught the wafting aroma of a pig farm -- well, let's say you are blessed.

I know someone who was like the prodigal son – perhaps you do too. Someone who can take a perfectly good life and make a royal mess of it.

The prodigal son I am thinking of changed when he was in his late twenties. He repaired his relationships with his family and rebuilt his life into something fine.

I asked him, years later, 'what happened? What caused you to grow up?'

He told me about one night, or early one morning, when he had been out partying with a woman he had known for a year – but whom he would never have introduced to his mother.

He was driving his old van home – the vehicle he had convinced his father to give him when he left.

He had been drinking and he fell asleep.

The next thing he knew, he was waking up to fountains of water spurting up through the floorboards. He had driven over a fire hydrant, and all that pressurized water was finding every rust hole in his vehicle.

He said, 'that was the moment I really woke up'.

For the prodigal son in the story, it was a pig sty – and the way his people felt about pigs, it must have been the worst possible place to find yourself in. So he went home.

And what was home like? A party!

As Paul wrote, "If anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!"

The word 'prodigal' has two uses:

The story Jesus tells begins with the prodigal son. That meaning of the word 'prodigal' includes:

- spendthrift, improvident, imprudent, immoderate, profligate, thriftless, excessive, intemperate, irresponsible, self-indulgent, reckless, wanton

- spending money or resources freely and recklessly; wastefully extravagant.
- As in "prodigal habits die hard"

In the middle, the story focuses on the Older Son

- He gets his own rude awakening, but his comes when the younger brother comes home, and he realizes he can't accept him. But Dad has a word for him too – and invites him to the party.

And the story ends with the prodigal father. In that use of the word we find a different meaning, including:

- generous, lavish, liberal, unstinting, unsparing, bountiful;
- copious, profuse;
- abundant in, abounding in, rich;
- bounteous
- having or giving something on a lavish scale.
- "the dessert was crunchy with brown sugar and prodigal with whipped cream"

When Jesus told this story, he was talking about more than people making peace with their relatives and getting on with growing up. He was talking about people finding their way back to a loving God, and he promises that this relationship, this place, ... the kingdom of God is not a stuffy, solemn place, but a joyful celebration to which all are invited.

Here are two universal figures – we have likely known or been one or both of them. As we get older, we may stand more often in the shoes of the one who judges. But the good news is the same for both of them. God loves us and invites us to the party.

This story, parable, is one of a bevy of 'reversal stories,' stories Jesus tells that turn things upside down. The widow searches and finds a lost coin, the last becomes first, the lost sheep is found. This is the essence of the good news for women and men who are oppressed, members of a community denied access to basic goods and services, a people who are struggling to breathe with boots on their necks. For those acquainted with struggle, these reversal stories offer remarkable good news.

The celebration worthy of the fatted calf is the one in which all are truly welcome, anything less than full inclusion is unworthy of a party.

So we are called to celebrate

- all invited into relationship with God.
- all embraced like the younger son.
- all challenged to welcome like the older son.
- all swept up into the everlasting arms of the prodigal father.

Our salvation through Jesus Christ calls for a joyous shout, not a long face.