

Prodigal Mercy: A Reflection on Luke 16:11-31

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Days, weeks had turned into months
of looking, waiting, yearning for his son's return.

The love in his heart moved him
to listen for his footsteps in every sound,
to look for his presence in every shadow.

As the day's work was coming to a close,
he once again took to the hilltop in the far pasture to scan the horizon.
He stood filled with both hope and dread,
fearing the worst
at the same time trusting that *this* day his son would come home.

He squinted his eyes to see in the distance against the setting sun.
Something moving caught his heart before he saw something slowly come.
Was it his son? Or simply an animal?
He looked again, shading his eyes with his hand
to see more clearly what his heart felt true.
It was his son — putting one foot before another
slowly, hesitantly, afraid he would not be welcome.

At once, without hesitation
and with energy born of compassion,
his father ran to him, not stopping to watch his step,
just eager to welcome his son as son.

The distance seemed like hours for the father
when really only minutes flew by to close the gap.

His father wrapped his arms around his son in loving embrace
and drew him to his heart.

His father stilled his son's stumbling words of repentance
with tears of love and warmth.

Servants had caught up with the father and were invited into the joy.

Please bring a robe for him, his own is tattered --

 a ring for his finger,

 sandals for his feet.

 Prepare a feast, the best there is and let us celebrate.

 My son lost and astray has come home;

 thought dead – he is alive.

I had been in the eastern fields, herding the sheep home,
when I heard music and laughter.

I was tired, and hungry; had put in a full day's work
and wanted nothing more than to bring the sheep through the gate,
eat some dinner and then take a well-deserved rest.

What was the do about, I asked some servants?

Your brother has come home
and your father is welcoming him with a dinner party.
You'll not have leftovers tonight.

He's no brother of mine.

Who does he think he is?

He's brought nothing but heartache and sorrow
 and here he comes waltzing in.

If he thinks I am going to welcome him, he's got another thing coming.

I would rather go hungry.

I stood pouting for a while, stubbornly jealous
enjoying my misery and resentment,
nursing my bitterness.

Dusk had given way to darkness when I felt my father's presence
standing close beside me.

He gently touched my shoulder with such tenderness
and yes, with deep sadness.

Your brother is home!

Is it not right we celebrate? He pleaded in my ear.

How can you? I choked angrily, wanting to shrug off his touch
yet not doing so,
as I felt his deep compassion enter my being.

He has wasted all your money,
and now he comes back for more.

Now Son, my father spoke softly, he is home. That is all that matters.
Money, we can make again.

What about me? I yelled.

I worked and slaved, never shirked my duty to you nor the family farm.
Even in my own ears I sounded selfish, hurt and jealous.

My father had never made me feel I had to do double duty,
nor take my brother's place,
nor work 24-hours in a day.

He hugged me close and I felt shame that I had saddened his joy,

sulked and put myself outside communion.

He wrapped his arm around my shoulder and drew me toward the door
gazing into my eyes with his whole being.

Oh Son, do you not yet trust my love for you?

You are always with me and everything I have is yours.

I need you to shepherd with my heart – my love, compassion.

He lovingly released his arm from my back and slowly turned to enter the banquet hall.

In the love of my father I followed
to welcome my brother – home.