

Title: When you wake-up
Text: Luke 15.17-20a
Theme: Seeing yourself as you are
Series: Luke, the 2 sons pt.2
Prop Stmtnt: You will never go home until you understand why you have to.

How many of you know people who decided to leave, go somewhere else and start over? They needed a fresh start. They needed to get away from their past and from the messes they had made or the memories of the messes they were in. How many of those people moved to a new place, got a new job, made new friends and never made any of the previous mistakes again? They learned from their past and they completely turned the page. How many people do you know who got remarried made a complete break from the past sinful and toxic habits that helped scuttle their first marriage?

It is so humbling to give a tremendous amount of effort to change your scenery only to discover that you still are what you were trying to get away from. I consider that as it relates to those who think that changing their gender will finally be the ticket for them to find peace. The surgeries, therapies, counseling, name change, legal steps and of course all the meds are a testimony to how some people are so desperate to find something that they are missing. What happens when you try to reinvent yourself only to pause long enough and look in the mirror into your own eyes and admit that you have the same insecurities, the same sense of lostness and the same darkness? What happens when you followed your heart like Disney told you to and you ended up all by yourself in a country where no one cared about you, where you were feeding pigs in order to delay your inevitable starvation?

Luke records 3 stories Jesus told about being lost and then being found. The sheep, the coin and the son. Jesus told these stories to his audience that had two distinct groups: the tax collectors/sinners and the Pharisees/Scribes. The tax collectors and sinners were often treated as if they had a disease. The Pharisees and Scribes were treated as if they were the cure. Both were desperately broken and empty. Just like you they needed to be rescued. Sins of offense or self-righteousness are equally guilty before God. It is more difficult for the self-righteous to believe that since they appear to be better than others. But the ground is level at the foot of cross. If you fail to wake-up to what you really are then you will never know who God really is. When you wake-up to what you are and admit that to God, now you are prepared to experience what he will re-make you to be.

Read Text:

I understand why this account has become known as the story of the prodigal son. We are tempted to view the younger son as being the real problem. The older son was dutiful and dependable. In the end, he was too ticked off at the chaos his younger brother had caused and was unwilling to put on a party hat and pretend that all was now right with the world. We are tempted to give him a pass. This frustration on the part of the older brother was a mere peccadillo compared to the trainwreck the younger brother caused. The real story, as we are

tempted to think is the younger brother, the prodigal and his return. But the truth is, this is a story that Jesus told about one father and two sons. And technically, Jesus gives a tad more attention to the sin of self-righteousness (think Pharisees) than to the sins of the younger brother (think tax collectors). Everyone is a sinner. Apart from Christ, everyone is an addict, a user of sorts. We all try to use something to help us cope with the sorrows, inequities and potholes of life that only make matters worse. Those of us who tend more toward the Pharisees and Scribes crowd are tempted to look at the younger son and feel at least some low-level disgust, maybe even anger. What a spoiled brat. What an insensitive jerk. What an ungrateful sloth. It's hard to feel too much pity for him slopping pigs. In fact, we feel a little vindicated in his predicament. You had it coming, dude.

What just happened? What is going on in our hearts when we think like that? Are we not classifying the sin of the younger brother as being categorically worse than our own? Are we not buying into the idea that obvious sins are somehow worse than hidden ones? Sins of rebellion are worse than sins of resentment or self-righteousness? Jesus is telling this story in order to teach several critical truths. Oh yea, there is a prodigal son here who needs to wake-up and come home. But there is also a dutiful son who, like his younger brother needs to wake-up and face the ugliness of his own self-righteous and bitter heart. For both of these boys, there is a merciful father waiting to restore the family.

At this point in the story, it is the younger son who is waking up.

1. **You have to wake-up.** (17a)

"But when he came to himself"

The younger son was feeding the pigs in the fields. He was so hungry that he found himself fantasizing about eating the food that he was giving to the pigs. It is the same idea that we will see in chapter 16, when the beggar Lazarus is so hungry that he is longing for anything that falls off the rich man's table. Hunger can cause you to be delusional and self-destructive. This boy had become someone that he did not recognize. 7 days a week, pigs had to eat. This inglorious job had no future and in fact, it really didn't make sense. In spite of his labors, he did not earn enough to eat himself. I imagine that he looked at his ribs covered in nothing but dirty skin and he looked at their ribs covered in pork and fat. The pigs had it better than he did. I don't know how long he did that job, but at some point, the penny dropped.

What am I doing here? He came to himself and finally had a moment of clarity. It looks like the scene in the Lord of the Rings where Theoden, King of the Riddermark comes out from the spell that Grima Wormtongue had put on him and realizes that he has been fooled and his kingdom was almost in ruins. He awakens just in time. He came to himself. Has this ever happened to you? Have you ever had a heart-to-heart conversation with yourself and asked yourself some difficult questions? Just because you go through difficulty, does not mean that you wake up.

I do not have survey results to back me up on this, but just going on my experience, I would guess that most people do not want to examine their lives. They are not willing to ask themselves hard questions because they fear what they might find. That is especially true for people raised with some kind of a strong, family, generational, perhaps ethnic, religious tradition. If you are in that and you start asking questions, you can get into big trouble. Have you ever thought long and hard about your life. Where did you come from? Why are you here? What do you really believe? How do you know it is true? What are you going to do about your life? How are you going to try to fix the mess you are in? This kid had been rebellious. He had been pig-headed but at least he had a moment of clarity. I wish this were true for all of us, but coming to himself was rare. What had happened? His desire overruled his logic. Did it make sense to take all of his inheritance and blow it on parties? I do not gamble because gambling is not logical. Gambling is not based on logic, but on desire, which is why the house always wins. But if I was a gambling man, I would always bet on desire over logic, because most of the time desire wins. Here is a rare moment. This young man fueled by desire and almost completely ruined by it has a moment of logic. *"How many of my father's hired servants have more than enough bread, but I perish here with hunger."*

I am my own worst enemy. I am the heart of my problems. My biggest problem is not out there. It is not who I married, who my parents are, who I work for, who raised me, it is me. And I need help because I cannot save myself. You have to wake-up. What happened to the Apostle Paul on the road to Damascus? He was on a mission, with a team of soldiers to go and persecute, arrest, perhaps kill Christians. He fully believed in his cause. Then God knocked him to the ground just outside the city and asked him, why he was persecuting him. Saul said, "Who are you, Lord?" And he said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting." In that moment, everything that Saul had believed about Christ was exposed as being wrong. He had to start asking himself hard questions. Why did I think that what I was doing was right? How could I have been so wrong? This may cost me my life. My friends are going to become my enemies.

Have you ever "come to yourself?" Have you ever been willing to ask what exactly are you doing with your life? What are you trying to accomplish? How many people have made it to the top, only to look around and say, "there really isn't anything here."? But if you are at the top, where everyone else is climbing toward, no one wants to hear that or believe that. Have you ever admitted that before God, you have no claim you can make on him? You have no righteousness that he accepts. You have no standing before him on your own. It is so hard to admit that you have no standing before God when you think that you still have things to hide behind. Standing gauntly in a field surrounded by obnoxious pigs, smelling as bad as they are, without anything to hide behind, the young man came to himself and finally became aware of what he really was and what he had really done. How about you?

2. How do you know that you have woken up? (17b-20a)

Humility is becoming aware of what we really are. You know that you have woken up when you start:

A. Asking good questions of yourself and answering them honestly. (17b)

How many of my father's hired servants have more than enough bread, but I perish here with hunger!

What is the answer? All of them. What is the implication? What am I doing here when I could be a servant and have bread? What is also implied is, what is going to happen if I stay here? What is going to change? Finally, he is thinking about the future and realizing that he is about at the top of the conveyer belt and is about to get zapped. What else does he realize? My father's hired servants (day laborers) have more than enough bread. I don't have enough bread. Wow, my dad treats his servants way better than my current master is treating me. What is wrong with me? Why did I think that I had it so bad with my father? I have been such a fool.

The son is at this point, right where some of you are. You know that you cannot continue on the road you are on without the wheels coming off. You know that already things have happened that are making that clear. You know that you need to change, but so far, you have only been willing to admit that to yourself. What would he do? What are you going to do?

A friend of mine was on a work trip and was in a hotel that had, according to his co-workers, great workout facilities. It was about midnight and he was in his room eating chocolate chip cookies, when he had a moment of clarity and said, "why am I doing this?" It is midnight and I am eating cookies, which had become part of a lifestyle that left unchallenged was taking him down a road with long term consequences. He thought of his wife and his kids that he wanted to be strong for. In that moment, he stopped and then he went looking for that gym. In that area of his life, he woke up. Some of you need to do that with Jesus. You know that you have woken up when you are:

B. Willing to change direction. (18a)

I will arise and go to my father.

For my friend, he literally got up, left his room and went looking for the gym and decided to start exercising early in the morning instead of eating late at night. For the younger son, he decided to get up and go home. This is what repentance looks like. Jesus began the Sermon on the Mount by saying, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, blessed are those who mourn, and blessed are the meek. This is what all of that looks like. The humility, brokenness over one's sin, not being large and in charge are all the result of realizing what you really are.

This is admittedly very difficult. We are tempted to cover it up and act like we don't need to talk about it. We can all just forget this ever happened. But this son had broken his relationship with his father and leaving it unaddressed was not an option and he knew it. If you have broken relationships, have you taken responsibility for your part in it? Are you willing to take the first step? How do you know if you have really woken-up? Are you willing to go back to the ones you have wronged and admit it? Are you willing to accept the consequences of your decisions, your sin without excuse, justification or blame-shifting? This willingness to change direction is the

result of a willingness to admit his sin to God and his father and to accept the consequences without excuse or complaint.

C. Willing to specifically and completely admit your failure (18b-19)

What a striking change of posture! Last week we noted 3 things about his demand. 1) He acted like he was in charge. 2) He acted like he was entitled. 3) He was hateful. It is all gone. All the ugly arrogance, self-centeredness, and repulsive foolishness is gone. It was a hard providence that wrung the drops of entitlement out of him, but what was left was a humble and appreciative son willing to completely own his failure. We know this because of the words that he uses.

He is preparing his speech. Here is what I will say. *“Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you.”* That is confession. My sin against you (horizontal) was sin before God (vertical). This is very important to note. How do we know that he means this? We can believe his confession because he is willing to accept the consequences without excuse. *I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants.”* You know that you have embraced your need when you are willing to specifically and completely admit your failure, without excuse.

In the movie, *Flight*, Denzel Washington plays the part of a pilot who in spite of an in-flight mechanical failure, heroically crash lands a commercial plane and saves almost everyone on board. A flight attendant died in the crash, trying to save a child. The authorities investigating the mechanical failure found two empty mini vodka bottles in the area that only the crew had access to. The pilot, named Whip, is now answering questions before a grand jury. An investigator asks him about the vodka bottles and with a picture of the flight attendant on a screen asks Whip if she had consumed the vodka. Whip starts sweating. He is an alcoholic and up until this moment, he has been able to hide it from almost everyone. He tries to stall so he can think of something. He asks the investigator to repeat the question. Then Whip whispers, *“God help me.”* The investigator asks again. Did the flight attendant drink the vodka. Then Whip says, *“She didn’t drink, because I drank it. I was drunk that day, and I’m drunk now.”* The court is stunned and Whip knows that his reputation as a hero and his career as a pilot is over. He is going to jail. He could have said that the flight attendant had drunk the vodka and he could have covered his lies, again. But in that moment, he woke-up. There is another scene where he, in prison is talking to some other inmates and looking back he says, *I was finished. I was done. It was as if I had reached my lifelong limit of lies. I could not tell one more lie. Maybe I’m a sucker, ‘cause if I had told just one more lie, I could’ve walked away from all that mess, kept my wings, my false sense of pride.... And this is going to sound real stupid coming from a man who’s locked up in prison, but for the first time in my life, I’m free.*

D. Doing it. (20a)

And he arose and came to his father. Are you ready to come home? He knew something that you need to know. You have things in your life that are not worth holding on to. And you have a Father who is worth coming home to.