

Jesus told a story about family - a father, two sons, the elder, the younger.

Years ago we sang a song - Love, love , love, that's what it's all about. Cause God loves us we love each other, Mother, father, sister brother. It's about love, love, love.

Love and families. That is what Jesus' story is about.

A father's love.

His youngest Son asked the unheard of - give me my inheritance now. The father would have to be dead for the son to inherit, but this father, in love with his son, played dead for him so the Son could have what he wanted and would not have to wait.

This father really loved that Son, the way a man is swept off his feet with a girl. He cant' stop buying for her, giving to her, wanting her to have everything she dreams of. This father loved his son like that.

Do you think the older son noticed?

Surely the whole village noticed when the father let a son's dishonorable request become reality. All the neighbors talked: Can you believe it, that younger son dishonored his father by wanting to take everything from his father now, while he was still alive and the father let him do it. And they were all shaking their heads.

Well, the younger son was off where the shame would not follow him, off spending as if he were really somebody. Wealthy.

And the older brother stayed home with his father's sadness,.

Every day he watched his father watch the road to see if his youngest might be coming. Eyes that were fixed on the road could not be sparkling with joy gazing at the older son.

Every day in town he heard the shame his younger sibling brought down on them all - the whole family shamed by what had been done.

Then came the day the father's eyes lit up once more. And he rushed down the road to let the whole village know his son was welcome. Whatever shame the son had caused his father was put aside, a robe, a ring, sandals, this younger son was honored. A feast was held, the whole village invited to share a calf celebrating the return.

But the older son would not come in.

What his brother had done had not simply involved his brother, but had shamed the whole family.

If I stole the Sunday offerings, and the headlines screamed to the whole county and beyond the county that your pastor was a thief, all of you would be shamed. Would you still share the feast with me?

The people Jesus was eating with were tax collectors. They were agents of the enemy, the occupying Roman army. Most tax collectors were scoundrels. It would be hard enough to forgive them if they came crawling home as the son in the parable, but Jesus was eating with unrepentant people. The text does not tell us they had renounced tax collecting.

The Pharisees were not joining the feast.

But the Son of God was not only joining in but hosting the feast - for sinners.

You will meet all sorts of people at this table. If it is really Jesus' table you will kneel down next to people whose behavior is shameful. Why your neighbors may hear about them and you would be ashamed to have people know they are your sister and brothers. Would you still come to the feast?

Someday your behavior may bring shame on the whole community. Would you still be welcome at the feast, would it be held in your honor?

On the cross Jesus stretched his arms wide enough to include sinners. Before they even get home, or say a word about being sorry he has arms wrapping around them. His arms wrapping around you. Which makes you one of them.

For the Pharisees that was the bad news, they were refusing to be one of them. But Jesus arms were still open - a place at the table was still reserved for them. Would they come in to feast with their brother?

Will you? Will I? Will we?

It is a great temptation for us to want to share a goat with only our friends. It is a great temptation to want to make sure there are none who could shame us invited to this table.

But whenever we do that there is no room for our Lord at this feast. For he became sin who knew no sin. So that the love of God might be in us. Come into the feast. One dead will be made alive, one lost will be found. Your sisters, your brothers, you.