

**The Fourth Sunday in Lent  
Holy Comforter Church  
The Rev. John E. Shields  
March 14, 2007**

**It's all about me**

**We hear and read a lot about the 'ME' generation. The 'ME' generation – it is not uncommon to see t-shirts and sweat shirts that say: "Its all about me."**

**A while back, I was with my youngest daughter at her home in Chapel Hill. I noticed that this lovely young woman had a coffee mug which stated plainly, "It's all about me."**

**I said "It's all about you?"**

**She replied, "Of course, just ask me!"**

**Now, she was joking and we both laughed, but it did make me think of today's gospel.**

**"It's all about me."**

**Conventional wisdom tells us: "The more things change, the more they stay the same" -- meaning of course that even though many externals change, the core issues stay the same.**

**"The ME generation;" "It's all about me." These aren't new things – they seem to have been around since the beginning and certainly play a prominent role in today's gospel.**

**Today we have that wonderful story, found only in Luke's gospel, about a father and his two sons.**

**You know the story as the parable of the Prodigal Son. A father has two sons – the younger wants his share of the inheritance (1/3 of the estate) and he doesn't want to wait around until his father dies, he wants it now – because he thinks: "It's all about me."**

**The father is loving and indulgent and he grants the younger son's wish. The boy goes off and starts to have a good time and because he believes "It's all about me" – he apparently is very self-indulgent and quickly runs out of money. Now desperate, the younger son takes any job he can and he gets the worst job that a young Jew could get – he is given the job of taking care of pigs and is so desperate that he is eating the same thing that he feeds the pigs.**

**The text says, "But when he came to himself, he said.... "I will get up and go to my father and ...say I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands."**

**You know the story: The father sees the son in the distance and he runs out to greet him – he enfolds him with an embrace and says to the servant – "Get the good clothes, the good jewelry and prepare a banquet with the best that we have to eat and drink!"**

**The party is going strong when the older son is coming in from the field – no doubt he hears the music; he gets a sense of something big going on and sends a servant to find out what is happening. The servant reports back that a party is in progress because his little brother is back in town.**

**The older brother gets angry – why? – Because he too thinks: "It's all about me." 'Yes, it is all about me – that sorry brother of mine doesn't deserve anything -- he has been out living a loose and irresponsible life spending his money on loose**

women, and I have been here working hard and doing what is right, and now he is getting a party and I am getting nothing! I should be getting rewarded for being the good person that I am.' --- "It's all about me."

By the way, where did the older brother come up with the loose women – there is nothing about it in the text – maybe a little projection going on here – what do you think?

You remember, of course, that the father comes out to the older son and invites him in, but the son is consumed with resentment – he can't get past his feelings ---he resists going in --- the father tells this son that he loves him and that all the father has is the son's -- and to please come and rejoice in the fact his brother is alive and back home.

In this story, both sons have journeyed away from the father -- the younger, literally by leaving --- the older psychologically and emotionally by living out a dutiful but joyless existence close to home...(described in one source as "...years of drudgery and uninspired obedience." ( Luke: Interpretation Bible Studies, Thomas Walker, p. 79)

The central character in Jesus' parable is the father. It is clear that the father's love extends to both his sons – even in the midst of their estrangement, extravagance, anger, resentment and repentance – in every case – young son or older son, the father is seen as dutifully waiting, offering forgiveness, assurance, joy, love and celebration.

Theologian Helmut Thielicke entitles his book about this parable: The Waiting Father. Perhaps that is the best title of all – for indeed the waiting father shows how unrestricted and unfettered God's love really is. The father waits in anticipation for the son who has journeyed to a far country – the father

**waits patiently for his son who has left through resentment and self-righteousness ... the father waits despite the entrapment of his sons and their “It’s all about me.” thinking.**

**Remembering Jesus’ audience as he tells this parable – we know that the gospel of repentance which he preached was readily received by those on the outside of the mainstream – prostitutes and tax collectors -- while this same gospel was often critically rejected by the dutiful religious leaders -- the scribes and the Pharisees. Might we possibly we see the two brothers in these two groups?**

**Might we also find ourselves in one or both of these characters? Some of us have traveled to a far country and lived lives that have been disappointing and contained things for which we are ashamed. Many others of us have been dutifully obedient and compliant, while at the same time jealous and restful of those who were once wild and away have now come to see the error of their ways and seem accepted and forgiven. (I’ve seen that so often with families of people in recovery from addictions.)**

**The message we have today – good people is that the father is a waiting and loving father – there is no place you have been that outdistances his love for you – there is no feeling – even your worst resentment --- that can drive the father from his post – waiting for your return to experience joy and renewal.**

**No matter where you are this morning – remember the father is waiting – come and accept his love, mercy and forgiveness.**

**So is it all about me this morning? Is it all about you?**

**No. It is all about how much you are loved by your heavenly Father—who waits to receive you. And the way to him is through the one who tells us the story this morning, even Jesus Christ our Lord. For as St. Paul so eloquently states in II Corinthians, in Christ our self-centeredness falls away and we become a new creation.**