

**"I've had enough."
(Luke 15:1-3;11a-32)
March 27, 2022**

In today's scripture, the first group of people who should say "I've had enough" must be the Pharisees and the scribes. Why? It's all because of Jesus. Whatever he said, whatever he did was against the Jewish tradition. And as you might all realize, Pharisees and the scribes were the ones who kept the Jewish custom straight almost to the extreme. They blamed Jesus for welcoming sinners. Who do you think those sinners might be? I don't want to make a long list, but the leper whom Jesus healed in the very beginning of his ministry by touching him must be one of them. Wait a minute; a leper should be a patient, not a sinner. You are right! You are right because you live in an era medical science plays an important role. Luckily, the correct information about leprosy reached you, and you put your trust in it. But, you know what, even now, there're still many people confused due to misinformation.

From time to time, my family and I would say, "Hei, Google," or "Hei, Siri," and then raise a question like "what is the smallest insect in the world?" to see how far artificial intelligence goes. You know what? It's like a joke most of the time. However, what if it's not just about curiosity but daily expenses and investment? The disclaimers and fine prints attached to all contracts are full of legal terminologies, hammered out by legal firms hired by big corporations. Do you fully understand them? What is the difference between a natural gas and electricity retailer and a utility distributor? Which is which? "All investments are highly speculative in nature," "Past performance is not

necessarily indicative of future results." The vulnerability of the general public is simply exposed to risks only the professionals would understand.

The people in the first century were not as knowledgeable as we are, and fewer options were available to them. Their lives were simpler but not necessarily luckier than ours. They were led to believe in retribution and understood human fate just the result of reaping what one sows. Some call this karma, while some identify it as sin. The Jewish Temple offered a place for the sinners to cleanse themselves. The synagogues provided a space for the faithful to learn how to keep their holiness. The Jewish culture provided an environment for all to know what they were and how to earn a rightful relationship with God. In the old days, people tended to believe that the sick people must have done something wrong that made them ill, and there was no hesitation for many to label the unfortunates as sinners. We shouldn't be surprised when we find the following groups of people were on the list, i.e., children, women, Gentiles, uncircumcised, tax-collectors, prostitutes, etc.

The Pharisees and scribes were against Jesus because Jesus mingled, chitchatted, and even ate with them. Jesus had demolished all the boundaries identified and kept in the Jewish culture, religious beliefs, and practices. Nevertheless, many people liked Jesus and even considered him as reputable as the religious leaders, if not higher. The Pharisees and scribes had enough of him since he stole from them the support and trust of the people.

Even the parable Jesus told was totally unacceptable. Firstly, the younger son was not entitled to his father's property when he was still alive. Secondly, it's unreasonable for the father to comply with his son's request. Thirdly, the son's return was for food instead of repentance for what he did.

Fourthly, the father's explanation to his elder son cannot explain away his favoritism towards the younger son.

So, the younger son might have said, "I have had enough," after spending all he got from his father and struggling to live. But he deserved it. He reaps what he sows. The father might have said, "I have had enough," too, after giving his younger son a good sum of money and waiting forever for his return. He deserved it since he was the one who spoiled his younger son. The older son was the only one eligible to complain and say, "I have had enough," because his father showed favor to his younger brother multiple times, but not even once to him. So, what was the point of Jesus telling this parable?

Do you realize that all the figures in this parable are not flawless but defective? The father was a good master who treated his servants pretty well. However, he was not a good father as he neglected his elder son, who was always with him and obeyed him. Even though the elder son has all the right to complain, he is also the only one in the family who would receive the best blessing from his father and a double portion of his father's inheritance when the time comes. The presence of his younger brother was a threat to him. Therefore, he had no compassion for his return. What about the younger son? He didn't become a saint. Instead of getting away from the family, now he saw the value of staying with his father.

The point of this parable was not to see any of these imperfect figures as models but the subject matter for celebration and rejoice. To leave the ninety-nine sheep in the open country is dangerous. However, if one feels good with wholeness, finding the sheep lost in the wilderness, even though it's only one, is worth it to celebrate. The nine silver coins in the pocket give

people a sense of security, but it's not comparable to the joy of recovering the lost one. The younger son might have died in the severe famine. But when he was found to be still alive, one should have a little bit of joy and happiness in one's heart.

Some call the parable we read today the story of the prodigal son, some the prodigal father, and some even want to delete the older sibling from the story so the flow of the story would be smoother. You can do whatever you want with it. However, we shouldn't miss that it's a story of rebellion and of a love that puts us back together as imperfect beings within a family. Can we live more generously? According to custom, to our common sense, it is easy for us to deflect responsibility, attribute blame to another person, and break the familial ties within our families and our church communities. Jesus presents a challenge to the Pharisees and scribes and us, who have played mainly by the rules. He is calling us for warm hearts and deep emotions and having an insight into the passion of God. Life and faith are not just about doing the right thing, but about being in genuine relationships and capable of bearing hurt and being put back together again.

It's storytime.

The master loved to tell stories about the disciples who came to learn doing spiritual exercises.

He said, "My first disciple was so weak that the exercises killed him. My second disciple practiced earnestly. However, he has driven himself crazy. My third disciple spent too much time on contemplation that he dulled his intellect. Only the fourth managed to keep his sanity."

"Why was that?" Someone asked.

"Possibly because he was the only one who refused to do the exercises precisely the way I taught him."

Don't just follow the flow. "I've had enough." Put this expression in the context of broken relationships, so it might become a motivation to seek wholeness. Put it on the receiving end of love and forgiveness, so we might channel the overflowing love and forgiveness to the world that needs it. "I once was lost, but now I'm found." Let the grace of God lead us all home. Amen.