

June 6 – “The End of Our Nose”




Image by Mantas Hesthaven

The Long Road Home

fresh eyes on a timeless tale

The End of Our Nose

Luke 15:11-13

Special Music: “Prodigal” Casting Crowns

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zt-IUMBWi30>

Luke 15:11-13

11 Jesus continued: “There was a man who had two sons.

12 The younger one said to his father, ‘Father, give me my share of the estate.’ So he divided his property between them.

13 “Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living.

THE END OF MY NOSE

Sometimes it's true
And quite apropos
When I can't see past
The end of my nose.

I blame the unknown.
But I want you to know
I know what life's like
At the end of my nose

What lies beyond it
I do not know
So, I keep my focus
On the tip of my nose

In keeping my focus
On the tip of my nose
And not trying to see
Where the greener grass grows

I don't have to worry
Whether my friends or my foes
Are laying in wait
Past the end of my nose.

My head in the sand

And striking a pose
I'm really quite safe
On this side of my nose.

Why take a chance
On which way the wind blows
If I can stay steady
Behind the end of my nose.

I know you may like me
But everyone one knows
You need to keep back
Six feet from my nose

When you keep your distance
From my nose and my toes
Then there isn't a problem
And I need not impose

My will upon your will
Or your will transposed
And I can keep staring
At the end of my nose.

My future seems bright
When I'm predisposed
To look no farther
Than the end of my nose.

Nothing can harm me
Though I'm overexposed
I am safe and secure
On this side of my nose.

Don't ask me to change
My outlook or prose
I'm very content
Looking down from my nose.

There are times in our lives when we feel trapped, not sure how to move forward. It can happen through the loss of a job, a divorce, a separation, the death of a spouse, a change in financial status, a personal disaster like a tornado or house fire. And all around you are friends, family and even complete strangers reaching out to help you make a decision on how to move forward. On top of the loss you have suffered, there is now a topping of confusion and doubt. You might feel like you are on “The Price is Right” or “Let’s make a Deal.” People are all shouting out answers to you all at the same time. “Take the box”, “Choose curtain three.” “Take the Money.” “Trade for the briefcase,” and you really can’t understand anything anyone is saying over all the noise. Most of the time, we just drop back and kick and making a quick decision before the world can break through the line and tackle our already despondent soul. We take the job at the supermarket. We move to another city. We get a lawyer. We start looking for a new place to live. Sometimes we just take the first available option because it stops all the noise. And then, everyone that had a different opinion tells you what a fool you are for not taking their advice. Friendships are tested and family ties are stretched to the breaking point.

There I was in the summer of 1974. I was in summer classes at Oklahoma Baptist University. I had lost my ministerial scholarship. I had lost my position as a youth director with a local Methodist church because I taught too much Old Testament and not enough New Testament. I was so confused. I knew that I was

on the right path so why did God throw up these roadblocks in front of me? What did He want? The denomination that I had devoted my life to no longer wanted me around. I could attend a Baptist Church, but I would never hold another leadership role. I felt deserted and betrayed. I didn't know where to turn. I didn't know if I needed to change schools, find another denomination, or just simply give up on my path to being a minister. My parents were disappointed. My home church was disappointed. My friends were disappointed. My mentors were disappointed. I felt God must be disappointed if everyone else was. But most of all, I was disappointed in myself. Not because of what had happened because I really didn't make any wrong decisions. But the truth that I confess is that I did not drop to my knees and look for an answer from God. In my confusions I ran around hoping someone, anyone could enlighten me rather than tell me what a fool I was. Mostly because I felt it was God who had taken this opportunity from me, punished me for non-conformity. Blaming me for not measuring up. Nothing could have been further from the truth, but I didn't understand or even want to understand. My perspective was warped because I refused to look beyond the end of my own nose.

Since I loved theatre and had been in several productions in my freshman year, I jumped at the chance when they asked me to join the program. I didn't even take time to really think about it. I took the first available option in order to regain my footing on the slippery landscape of my college studies. It simply did not feel safe beyond the end of my nose. I just wanted everyone to stop shouting.

It was not the only time in my life that I was forced to make decisions before I was ready to. There were several times when my life fell apart and I didn't know which way to turn, when I thought I was on the right track only to reach a dead end or a broken bridge. Being a minister seemed like some elusive, untouchable dream, so why not do things that I enjoyed? Why not stay in my comfort zone rather than make a bigger fool out of myself.

The reason eventually became clear. You see, I gave up on God's answers and direction for my life. But let me make one thing perfectly clear. No matter how far I strayed, no matter what I did, no matter how big my mistakes, no matter how often I painted myself into a corner, Jesus never, ever left my side. He never took His hands off of me. He never allowed me to hide from His grace. He never stopped running interference for me. He never, ever pulled His presence back because He was well aware that I was that one that had wandered away and He was going to make sure that I got safely back to the flock. He had a purpose for me that needed to be fulfilled.

As we begin this study of The Parable of the Prodigal Son, I want us to start at that place where the young man starts making bad decisions because he can't see beyond the end of his nose.

“There was a man who had two sons.

The younger one said to his father, 'Father, give me my share of the estate.' So, he divided his property between them.

“Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living.”

Most of us are quick to judge this young man thinking that what he is doing a stupid thing. He had a pretty good life with his father and brother. Why would he throw it all away? Well, that is what happens when we can't see beyond the end of our nose. But there are some things that we need to take into account. Not justifications or excuses for his behavior but an attempt to understand how he got to this point.

- 1. At this time in Jewish history, more often than not, only the first-born son inherited anything from his father. Every other son was expected to find a way to make it in life on their own. So, when the younger son asks for his share of inheritance, the father really didn't have to give him anything. What he gave him was from his heart and we can guess that it was not even close to half of the father's worth.**
- 2. Second, we see the young man as obstinate, insisting on leaving home. He isn't the first kid to ever run away. At least he was honest about it. Unfortunately, he wasn't prepared to make his way on his own. He didn't have the skillset to readily survive. He obviously did not have**

enough common sense to be conservative with the money that his father had given him. And he probably had never seen that much money in his life. Statistics show us that one third of big lottery winners go bankrupt within a couple of years, simply because they don't know how to manage their new found fortune. The same is true of many professional athletes. So, the boy is not alone in not understanding the way the world works and how to use money appropriately. And his only real skillset is helping his dad run the farm.

3. Lastly, he doesn't seek any counsel. He goes it alone. He won't listen to any input. He has his mind made up and no one is going to talk him out of it. This is probably the most important decision that he has ever made, and he feels more than qualified to make that decision without any help from anyone. Let's be honest with each other. Everyone has done this as some point in their life. I'm not sure if it is a natural instinct or just plain obstinance. But there will always be those times when we put our foot down and nothing is going to move it. Even if those who are closest to us, are wiser and more experienced. We are simply not going to budge an inch, insisting that we will learn our lessons the hard way. And that is what usually happens, and we pay a huge price for it as well as hurting those people we love most. Don't you know that this father was torn up that his son would do this, knowing what what his son would be facing and the probability of failure? Did you ever make a less than ideal decision and your parents let you do it because they

knew that there was no stopping you and you were just going to have to learn your lesson by having to live with the results of those decisions? That feeling that we don't need or want anyone else's help will come back to bite us every time. Have you ever had to do this with your own children? It's hard. We all want to protect our children but, at some point, we have to let them go so that they can start making their own decisions, good or bad. Our only consolation is that maybe they have learned enough from us that there will be more good decisions than bad ones or that they will come ask our advice when they get in over their heads. I'm sure that the boy's father would have been more than happy to help him find his way and make a go of it if the boy hadn't cut the ties and been so unwilling to listen. The boy was so desperate to sever the relationship that he moved to another country so that no one would interfere with his decision making process.

The boy probably had some wild delusion that he was going to find his place in the world, make his fortune, gloat to his father and his brother and watch the world bow at his feet. As he partied his way into financial ruin the only thought that he had running through his mind is "Look at all this fun that dad and brother are missing out on." We keep our eyes open in astonishment as we see the boy finding all kinds of new ways to spend money but absolutely no way of making money. What eventually happened was inevitable.

He probably made a lot of new friends as he partied his way through his finances. And my guess is that the moment his bank account ran dry, so did those relationships. Friendship can only be tested in times of need. That is when you find out who stands beside you and who goes looking for a different friend.

That's when all the finger pointing starts:

“How could you let this happen to your son? Didn't you love him?”

“How could you do this to your father? Don't you know how much he loves you?”

“Some big brother you are! You just let him walk away and you never went to try and bring him back. Don't you understand your role as a big brother? Can't you see how heartbroken your dad is?”

No one wants to be the owner of this dilemma. Nobody wants to say, “I messed up and should have done something.”

This happens all too often in families even today. I'm not going to spend a bunch of time on family dynamics or psychology here, but there is enough blame here to go around. If you were to put these three people in a room, you would get three different stories, but you might also gain some understanding regarding how this all came about and possible things that could have been done to prevent it. It is a

story that so very many parents, especially today, have to deal with and try to find a way to ground everyone so that they can move on. You've either heard or experienced these stories yourself. The son who winds up addicted to drugs. The daughter who becomes pregnant at 15. The step-daughter that is addicted to alcohol and winds up in a car wreck. The son who decides that robbing convenience stores is an acceptable way to make a living. Stories where parents often step in after the fact to try and make the crooked path straight. Parents who walk that fine line between helping their children and enabling them.

I am not speaking from a place of condemnation, but from a place of reality and pain. These are real issues that every parent faces at some point. The world we live in can be a hard place for our children who are trying to make that transition from adolescence into adulthood. And once they start making bad decisions, those bad decisions often become compounded. And yes, everybody wants to blame themselves or someone else rather than seeing it from a point of grace, mercy and growth.

It is hard for all of us to look at the dark side of our families. We peek and then glance away. Don't you know the father in this parable could see the pain in his son's eyes as he tried to find his place in the world and was unable to find it at home? It touches us in ways that most stories don't and much of the reason for

that is that this parable, although just a story, hits on the very points that parents and children face today.

Children need to leave the nest at some point. But we do everything we can to prepare them for that moment. And yes, we feel the failure ourselves if they find themselves in a pickle and can't see a way out. We ask ourselves, "What could we have done different?" "What could we have done better?" Sometimes we know the answer. Sometimes we just keep kicking ourselves because we don't know the answer.

Spoiler alert! As hopeless as this story sounds, as dark as the clouds appear to be, this is actually a story of promise and hope. But I have to remind you, that it gets worse before it gets better. There are times when we realize how out of control our lives have become and sometimes it is because of our own bad decisions. But I refuse to leave you in that dark place. Because this is a story of restoration and forgiveness, not hopeless doom. But just like we can't snap our fingers and make all our troubles go away, we have to view this parable in stages so that we can find that promise at the end. We can't make the world a better place by closing our eyes to misfortune and discomfort, our own or others. The Parable of the Prodigal Son takes us on a journey of realization and how God walks with us to face and overcome the challenges in our path.

I pray that you will continue on this journey with me as we continue studying this story and what Jesus is trying to teach us. Don't walk away from the darkness just yet. It is in that darkness that the light shines the brightest when it comes. It is when we find a way to look outside of ourselves and past the end of our nose that we come to understand the depth of this teaching. Hiding behind our noses may keep us from experiencing the brightness of that light. It will most assuredly keep us from embracing the love and grace that God offers, personally and also through His children.

God bless you all!

AMEN

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