

Sermon for Sunday, June 8, 1975, by Andrew A. Jumper, D. D., Pastor  
Central Presbyterian Church, St. Louis, Missouri

"PIG PENS AND PALACES"

St. Luke 15:11-32, St. John 14:1-3 (KJV)

Text: "In my Father's house are many mansions..." St. John 14:2  
"But when he came to himself he said....I will arise and go to  
my Father..." St. Luke 15:17, 18

The older I grow and the more of life I see, the more convinced I become that the Bible is right about you and me. You see, the Bible says that man--you and I--suffer from a problem called "original sin." The Bible says that God created the first man, Adam, but that man rebelled against God. He broke fellowship with God, and as a consequence committed sin. As a result of that sin, all of us who have descended from Adam suffer the consequences of that original sin. There is a basic flaw in you and me. There is a fatal defect in us. Mankind suffers from a malady that ultimately destroys him.

Now, there are many who do not like to be told that man has a basic defect or a fatal flaw. There are those who would like to believe that by political, or economic, or educational or scientific or psychological means, man could find some way to solve his problems. Yet, that seems an illusion for the dreamer. P. A. Sorokin, a former Russian revolutionary leader and a renowned sociologist, conducted an exhaustive search of human systems and schemes, looking for a cure to human ills. Yet, at last he wrote, "Without the Kingdom of God, we are doomed to a weary and torturing pilgrimage from calamity to calamity, from crisis to crisis, with only brief moments of transitory improvement for regaining our breath." And Arnold Toynbee, the noted historian, once said that as long as original sin remains an element in human nature there is no need to expect any change in man. He states that there has been no perceptible variation in the average sample of human nature in the past, and so there is no ground, no evidence in history, to expect any great variation in the future. According to Toynbee's study, all 6,000 years of recorded history reveal one truth: Man cannot save himself.

Is there any hope for the dilemma of man? Lit-sen Chang was a Buddhist for nearly 50 years. On his way to India to promote a resurgent movement for Oriental religion and civilization, he was converted to Christianity. He writes, "Only Jesus Christ can make a complete change in human nature and a fundamental transformation of the human value system." That is what I want to talk about this morning. Can your basic nature with all of its flaws, its defects, its imperfections, be changed? And if it can, wouldn't you like to know how? I have been interested in recent years at the efforts of many liberal ministers to promote what is sometimes called "social action." But let me suggest to you that the so-called social action preachers are really social activists. An activist is somebody who tries to change the world. It is somebody who tries to change social structures. The activists put on wild street demonstrations. They fly to Paris to meet with the leaders of Hanoi, they meet in mass gatherings at the Washington Monument, they form committees to lobby in the National Capital, and they have their denominations pass all sorts of resolutions. But that is not social action, it is social activism. The person who does social action goes to war-torn and poverty-ridden countries with the Gospel, with food and medicine, with doctors and nurses and at the risk of his own safety and life, he tries to share Jesus with desperate men



arose and came to his father," You see, it is not enough to recognize what your need, your problem is. You must act on it. You must repent.

Now, I suspect there are some of you here this morning who are here because life is not working very well. Things have not turned out as you hoped. There are serious and desperate needs in your life and you have come this morning hoping that here you will find some answers, that here some of your needs will be met. But God can't help us until we repent, until we turn from our present ways and turn to his ways. Unfortunately, many of us are waiting for some great emotional experience to change us. We are waiting for some bolt from heaven to strike us and change us. But repentance doesn't work that way. Repentance is an act of the will. To repent for the prodigal meant to leave where he was, it meant to depart from the far country, it meant to make his way back to his father's home. And it may mean exactly that for us. Repentance is a rebel going home. It means a change of life-style, a change of friends, a reorientation of one's conduct, a change in the places we go, the things we do.

Now, do not be confused about sin. Repentance is more than rejecting some obvious sin in my life. It is more than just stopping doing something that I am doing. Repentance gets at original sin, it gets at the root of sin, it deals with the human will. Repentance means that I not only stop doing certain things, it means most of all that I stop going my own way. Like the prodigal son acting on his decision and actually going home, I turn around, I submit to God, I surrender myself to do whatever God wills of me.

If you have recognized your need this morning have you gone the second step to repent, to surrender your will to God? And that is more than scrubbing down some of the pig pens we live in. It means getting out of them entirely. It means getting out of them entirely and going home to the father, surrendering our wills completely to him. As the prodigal put it, "Make me as one of your hired servants."

The third thing I would call to your attention about the prodigal is his return. First, he recognized his need; second, he repented; and then third, he returned. There is a difference between "head faith" and "heart faith." Head faith is mere intellectual acceptance of something without any corresponding change in life. There are a lot of head faith Christians this morning. They believe certain historical facts of doctrinal statements about Jesus without any change in life. The prodigal not only believed with his head that his father would accept him back, but he believed it with his heart and he acted on it. He could have stayed in the pens with the pigs, he could have stayed in his dreadful condition, saying with his head, "I know father would accept me back." But he had heart faith in his father and the Bible says of him, "And he arose and went to his father."

What do you believe about God this morning? Do you believe that Jesus is God's son, that he died for your sins, that he is able to change your life, that he wants you to come to him, to receive him as your Savior, and that he will give you a new life? Well, you can believe it with your head and still be in the pig pens of life. Only when you believe it with your heart--believe it enough to act on it--only then will you leave the far country.

Yesterday we were out in our rose garden. We have a snake that lives out there. His is non-poisonous and he keeps the field mice killed out, so we are glad to have him. But still, a snake can be scary. Out little six-year-old slipped her hand in mine and said, "Daddy, I'll just hold your hand in case we see our snake." She not only believed I would protect her, she acted on her faith and put her hand in mine. Well, that is faith acted out. That's what the prodigal did. He acted out his faith, he returned home, he slipped his hand into the father's.

There is just one final thing I would like to call to your attention. First, the prodigal recognized his need, he repented of his sin, and then he returned to his father. Notice then the reception he got! The Bible says, "But while he was yet at a distance, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. As the father put it, "for this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost and is found." Jesus tells us that in our father's house there are many mansions and the father is waiting to welcome home his lost children. The sort of choice we have is between pig pens and palaces. Which will it be for you?