

**Fourth Sunday in Lent/March 31, 2019**

**Psalm 32; Luke 15:1-3, 11b-32;**

**Movie clip from "Jesus of Nazareth" (TV Mini-series, 1977)**

**Rev. Joel M. Krueger**

*"A Heart of Mercy"*

Today's gospel reading from Luke is the well known parable of the Prodigal Son. Also known as the parable of the Loving Father. I decided that instead of having it read from the lectern today, we would hear it from the mouth of Jesus. Or at least from Jesus as portrayed by Robert Powell in the 1977 TV mini-series *Jesus of Nazareth*.

As one of my most favorite movie scenes, this powerful and gripping adaptation gives us another way to hear and to see how Jesus may have told this parable and gives us a chance to contemplate it in a new way.

So, let me set the stage. Jesus has been calling his disciples to follow him. Andrew has introduced him to his brother Simon Peter, the fisherman. We have just seen the story of Jesus telling the disgruntled and annoyed Simon to take his boat out into deep water and to let down his nets, at which they take in a great haul of fish. Hearing that Simon has had this great haul, the tax collector Matthew/Levi, decides to make a visit to the fisherman's house to collect some back taxes. So we find Matthew entering the house of Simon Peter, where Jesus is teaching the crowds.

*(Play scene from Jesus of Nazareth, #37 and #38, 15 minutes in length)*

So, in one word, **what is this parable about?**

(love, forgiveness, relationship, acceptance, grace, mercy . . .)

Yes, it is about . . .

But ultimately it is about **mercy and reconciliation**.

What I really like about this portrayal of this parable in *Jesus of Nazareth* is that it is about more than understanding what the parable is about. It is about more than having a *theological* grasp of the story or *intellectually* knowing its meaning.

We see that the power of the parable is when we can *place ourselves within it*.  
When we can *experience* it ourselves.  
When the story becomes OUR STORY.  
When we become the Prodigal, or the Elder Son, and know the Abundant, Extravagant Love of the Father's embrace.  
Or when we become that Father's love for another.  
When we experience the power of *reconciliation* ourselves.

In this Lenten season, as we continue our journey toward Easter, may we seek the *experience of mercy and reconciliation* with one another - with those with whom we disagree, with those we may dislike, with those whom we may regard as mortal enemies. For this is the story that is given to us, by the **One who is Mercy and Love, Abundant and Extravagant Love**, who stands *waiting and watching*, with open arms, for *our return*. Amen.