

4TH SUNDAY OF LENT

Years ago Rod Serling created the show *The Twilight Zone*. He put together stories of fiction that got the viewer to imagine not just how things are, but how things might be. Each episode had a twist in the story line.

In one episode astronauts are sent into space but something goes wrong and they crash land with few supplies. The crew thinks they have landed on an asteroid or planet that has no water. They suppose they could be rescued, but the supplies will certainly run out before that help could come. One individual decides to kill his shipmates so that he might live. At the end of the show he discovers that they have not crash landed on another planet, but in the desert in Nevada. There was no reason to kill anyone.

Often enough when we think we are not loved or respected or cared for we human beings can resort to being cruel and selfish. How often have you seen someone, or maybe yourself say, "Take care of #1 because no one else will." The parable Jesus told about two sons might have been titled that way.

The younger son didn't want to wait for his father to die to get his share of the inheritance so he demands his father give him what he believed he was owed. He figured he would make his own way in the world and neither his father nor anyone was going to tell him how to live. Yet this son was wild and wasteful. He didn't know how to spend his money properly so he lost it all and ended up in the worst possible life working for gentiles and taking care of pigs, unclean animals to Jews.

This son at least had enough sense to remember that his father treated hired hands well back at home. He would go home and seek to be treated like a slave that he had become. But soon, this son will enter *The Twilight Zone*.

The father was waiting each day, hoping his wayward son would return home. One day he spots him coming to the village and runs out to greet him. The boy doesn't even get a chance to make his confession when his father welcomes him home by greeting him, putting shoes on his feet and a ring on his finger. He will not be a slave, but a son. Then he orders the fatted calf killed to rejoice. Yes, this was strange indeed.

Yet, the older son was also in it for himself too. He lived in the house of a father who was gracious and merciful yet he didn't feel loved. He considered himself a slave for his father. He saw his father as miserly and so he couldn't wait for him to die and inherit the rest of the property to finally get his due. The father wants this older son to experience his mercy and love just as surely as the younger son had, but the boy would have none of it.

The catch in the story is that neither son realized they were loved by their father. Neither son was content to have the assurance of their father. Instead one became a slave in a foreign land and the other became a slave at home. I wonder how often this parable is our story.

Many people go through this life not believing they are loved. They may not have felt love by other people in their lives, but they don't feel loved by God either. This parable reminds us that our God doesn't play by the rules. He lives in the *Twilight Zone*. We don't deserve mercy yet God forgives us. We don't deserve everlasting life and yet Jesus suffered and died so that we might attain it. We don't deserve anything and yet each day God

blesses us in so many ways. Yet, how many people still think they have to be in it for themselves.

Lent should be a season to remind us not how bad we are, but how good we are. We shouldn't do sacrifices because we are terrible sinners, but do them out of love for a God who loved us first. The story of the Prodigal Son is our story. Our father is always looking out for us waiting for us to realize we have been blessed already. He wants us to experience great joy.

Then, you know what? We are to become reconcilers ourselves. We are to have that same Twilight Zone mentality with all those we meet. We are to bless and forgive because we have received mercy in abundance. Count your blessings this day, rest in the Father's love for you, and then go out and do the same for someone else. If you are able to do so I know you will know peace and joy in abundance.