

You may have noticed that we did not read much of the story of the younger son in today's Gospel. That is because we know the story of the prodigal son very well. He was the one who inappropriately asked for his inheritance, left home to fulfill his own desires, and wasted his life in self-pleasure.

We also know that when the prodigal comes back home, the Father is waiting and watching. The Father waits for his children to come home to their true inheritance.

So the Father welcomes his children when they come home. That is the point of the first part of the Parable. We know the story of these sons and daughters very well.

What about the other son in the story? This son – or this daughter – is the one who was baptized as an infant, confirmed as a teenager, and began giving their offerings in their 20's.

This child knows the most remote corners of the Church building, because these children have served countless dinners in the church kitchen, and have brought unnumbered cakes and casseroles for Church dinners and funerals. These children have sat in stuffy Sunday School classrooms and have taught Sunday School.

How well do you know the story of this older son? I do! It is me! It is my story. That is the story I want to focus on this morning.

The oldest son, or was it the daughter... The oldest child said:

"I was just finishing my work. I raked the Church lawn, washed the Church dishtowels, prepared for the Church Sunday School Lesson, wrote out my check for the Church offering, laid out my clothes for the Church service, read the Church newsletter. I had finished my work for the week.

"I came to Church that morning and there was this party! I mean, it was a celebration! Seems my sibling who has not darkened a Church door in 15 years – except for Christmas and Easter – came to Church today. Says he is sorry and wants to know if he can come home.

“There he is, sitting on the chairs I helped buy, eating the doughnuts I picked up at Hornbacher’s, talking to my Pastor... The Pastor who never even thanked me for shoveling the snow after last month’s storm. And there is our Visitation Minister, giving all sorts of time to my deadbeat sibling.

“This Church was doing just fine without my brother coming home. There are plenty of other churches where he could go. He will just create more work. And who knows if he is really sorry..”

“Just then you hear your Father. ‘Look, my dear son. You have always stayed with me. Everything I have is yours.’”

It is the way my Father says those last five words that makes me start to do my own repentance. **Everything I have is yours...**

Yahweh Yireh. That is the name before us this morning: The Lord will Provide. When Abraham was ready to sacrifice the most precious thing in his life to God – his son, Isaac – God came and made a commitment to sacrifice his Son, Jesus.

He showed Abraham a ram – a temporary offering for sin. God was saying to Abraham, “Sacrifice the ram, not your son. Another Father will sacrifice his only Son on this spot later.”

Years later, on the spot where Abraham sacrificed the ram, God watched his Son die. This time no ram was called in as a substitute. God did not say, “Stop. Someone else will pay the price.”

God knew that a ram’s blood would not provide what was needed. God had promised to provide, and God provided. On Golgotha: the Lord provided. *Yahweh Yireh: The Lord will Provide.*

We sometimes think that the foundation for our relationship with God depends on what we provide. It depends on my watering the Church plants, or my singing in the Church choir, or my delivering the best sermon ever.

That is what the oldest son may have felt. He may have thought in his heart: I have done all the work. I have provided all these things for my Father.

But the Father makes the true relationship clear when he says: *“Everything I have is yours...”*

What does that mean? It is an incredibly important phrase in this story. Well, I have given that a little thought this past week. And I picture the answer today in terms of breaking balls, changeups, and fastballs.

Sprint training has begun. As of yesterday morning the Twins Spring record was 8 wins and 9 losses. It made me think about baseball pitches – and life.

There are three basic pitches in baseball and in life. There are many variations of these three, but three basic pitches.

1. **Breaking balls.**

Breaking balls have a sideways movement or a downward movement. They are the curveballs and sliders and sinkers. In life there are also curveballs, sliders, and sinkers as well.

We can call these trouble. We think life is going as we intended, and then here comes a curveball.

What do we do in troubling times? My routine is this:

- I eat. The food tastes good; I am satisfied for a while. But then 3 hours after I eat Scandinavian food, 2 hours after I eat Hispanic food, or 1 hour after I eat Asian food, I find I am hungry again. I still have the trouble in my life. So...
- I go shopping. I buy myself a flash drive or a wireless keyboard. I feel great for however long it takes me to set up and install my new toy. But then I still have the same trouble in my life. So...

- I play racquetball. I was really stressed the day Rick and I were playing and he lost the use of his arm for 12 weeks. I felt good for a while. But then after the post-racquetball shower the trouble was still there.
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None of those things are wrong. They are just in the wrong order. At the top of that list there is something missing.

The Lord says, *"Call on me when you are in trouble, and I will rescue you, and you will give me glory."* [Psalm 50:15]

When I go to the Lord first and say, "Lord, I believe everything you have is mine..." When I claim that promise, then everything looks different. We first connect with God's power to change things.

2. There are breaking balls in life and there are changeups.

Changeup pitches looks like they are moving fast, but they arrive at an unexpected time. In your life and mine there are unexpected arrivals. We need to know when unexpected challenges come our way that the promise of the Father is still true: *"Everything I have is yours."*

Do you know the name of Emily Kingsley? If you have ever watched *Sesame Street* you know her work. Emily Kingsley has won 12 Emmy Awards as a writer for *Sesame Street*.

She has a son who was born with Down Syndrome. Emily wrote a piece about what it is like to raise a special needs child. The piece is called, "Welcome to Holland." It is a great help on handling the changeups of life. Emily writes:

When you're going to have a baby, it's like planning a fabulous vacation trip - to Italy. You make your wonderful plans. It's all very exciting.

After months of eager anticipation, the day finally arrives. You pack your bags and off you go. A few hours later the plane lands. The stewardess comes in and says, "Welcome to Holland."

"Holland?!?" you say. "What do you mean Holland?? I signed up for Italy! I'm supposed to be in Italy. All my life I've dreamed of going to Italy."

But there's been a change in the flight plan. They've landed in Holland and there you must stay.

The important thing is that they haven't taken you to a horrible, disgusting, filthy place, full of pestilence, famine and disease. It's just a different place.

After you've been there for a while and you catch your breath, you look around.... and you begin to notice that Holland has windmills....and Holland has tulips. Holland even has Rembrandts.

But everyone you know is busy coming and going from Italy... and they're all bragging about what a wonderful time they had there. For the rest of your life, you will say "That's what I had planned."

And the pain of that will never, ever go away... because the loss of that dream is a very significant loss.

But... if you spend your life mourning the fact that you didn't get to Italy, you may never be free to enjoy the very special, the very lovely things ... about Holland.

Some of you have had some huge changeups in life: great disappointments that came at unexpected times.

God is always in your life to say, *"Everything I have is yours."* And we can find some hope and peace even in the new places. We accept that God is in this place with us.

3. There are breaking balls in life and there are changeups, and there are fastballs.

For me, that is the realization that death is around the corner – and I keep getting closer and closer to the corner.

I never used to think about that corner. Then I started thinking it about once in a blue moon. Then a little more often. Maybe because I officiate at so many funerals I think about death more often than the average person my age.

I am not at the point yet where I read the obituaries to make sure I am still among the living. But, I think about that corner every once in a while. Life is a fastball, and it is a mighty fast life.

I rely on that promise of the Father regularly when these thoughts of the fast life come my way: *“Everything I have is yours.”* That includes a resurrected life.

What does this mean for us today? I think the Father was so disappointed in his oldest son because he was not willing to share all these things with his brother.

His Father gave him the gifts to deal with the breaking balls, the changeups, and the fastballs of life. Was not the older brother willing to share these gifts with the younger brother?

One of the three purposes of our life together as a Church Family is to Proclaim the Gospel. That is not just a nice phrase. It is proclaiming the Good News that the Father gives all that he has to a prodigal child who repents – and that includes me.

The concrete ways that we proclaim the Gospel is in our Worship and in our Invitations. Once again, these are not just nice phrases. They are the ways that the Father extends his welcome, and grows his family.

The Father always welcomes another lost person to his banquet table. It is our privilege to keep the place ready, and to serve the banquet.

Let us pray: Thank you, Father, for saving a place for me at your table of grace. Thank you for giving the gifts that allow me to live with purpose and meaning in this life. Thank you for the promise of someday seeing you face to face.

Because you Son told the story of the older son, I know that I have a tendency to want to keep these gifts to myself. Remind me today, Father, that you are the Lord who Provides. . None is from me – all is from you. Help me to share the grace this week. Amen.