

Chat with Children: How do we see ourselves?

- Look through the photos of me, and see how I've changed!!
 - talk about how I've never quite thought of myself as looking like **any** of these pictures!
 - **though they are certainly me...**
- Often we need someone else to help us see ourselves as we really are:
 - not just on the outside, which a camera can do...
 - but on the inside too...
 - for we all have **warped** or **unbalanced** pictures of ourselves and the way we behave
- Some of us think we are better than we are
 - some of us think we are worse than we are
 - some of us think no one loves us
 - some of us think we are "God's gift"!
 - some of us think God can't love us, and we can't be friends with him
 - some of us think God is lucky to have our allegiance, that he'd be stuck without us!
- And while there may be elements of truth in some bits of those...
 - **they are all wrong, because they are our pictures of ourselves**
 - when what we need is **God's picture of who we are, especially in relation to him**
- That's what today's parable will help us see....

Introduction

- We looked at this parable back at the beginning of our series
 - and **concentrated on what it shows of God**, his nature as the true Father, gracious, compassionate, forgiving...
 - we all have our lenses, our perspectives when we see God, and this parable helps us see him more clearly...
- But this parable doesn't just reveal things about God, about his Fatherhood, about his profound love for us...
 - **it also reveals things about us, about our responses to him!**
 - does that as we look at the other characters in the story, the two sons...

The Prodigal who left home

- Selfish, self-centred, own priorities, own interests, pleasure seeking, self-fulfilment...
 - look long and hard at the way we **actually** spend our lives, and see our own priorities
 - our time...
 - our money...
 - our relationships...
 - our ambitions...

The Prodigal who came home

- Realisation hit:
 - **consequences of his choices became clear to him** - cut off from father, from family, from security, from inheritance, from hope, from a future, from food...
 - turned around, away from seeking his own priorities to seeking his father's forgiveness and acceptance, knowing he didn't deserve it

- Will we follow the same path?
 - back to the Father...
 - path of humility - "I am a sinner"
 - path of repentance - turning away from self-interest

The Prodigal who stayed home

- Here in church, in the community of faith, lurks a different danger
 - the son who stayed at home thought he was safe
 - he thought he was "in" with his father
 - he thought his inheritance, his future, his life was secure
- But the reality was he'd lost connection/relationship with his father
 - he was physically present, but relationally distant...
 - he describes himself as a slave, not a son (29) - a self-understanding that points to a sober reality... slaves do not inherit
 - his relationship with his father was all to do with duty, not love, bitterness, not joy
 - same essential selfishness was at the heart of his attitude as his brother when he left home - looking to his own interests, not his Father's...
- Are we in danger of straying into the same kind of relationship with God?
 - do we know God's love, or are we only aware of trying to behave in a way that seeks to keep him happy?
 - do we know his care, his concern for us, or are we only aware of duties and responsibilities that come from faith?

Conclusion

- Which prodigal am I?
 - it matters, for it was neither the prodigal who left home nor the prodigal who stayed home who was found, who was alive as we finish the story...
 - rather it was the prodigal who came home who enjoys the party, the celebration of home-coming...
 - it is the prodigal who comes home who enters glory, who comes into heaven - a party or feast is one of the defining descriptions of heaven in the NT...