

1. L.15 is three pearl-stories strung on a string of joy upon finding the lost--the lost sheep, coin, son....the last detailing the opposite of joy upon finding the lost brother, thus highlighting the fact that the central character in vv.11-32 is the prodigal father [not "the prodigal son" or the begrudging brother]. God's eagerness to restore the lost, fractured relationship supervenes over considerations of convention [the sanction of public opinion: what would the neighbors think?] and ethics [fairness to the older brother] and common sense [which would dictate caution and testing, rather than wild abandon to celebration] and education [wouldn't it've been better for YS (the younger son) to earn his way back instead of spoiling him rotten with a bash?]. Truth to tell, says Jesus, God does not act according to the normal, moral, legal, social, economic, politic and political expectations. How radical can you get? Not more radical than to announce that God cannot be counted on to ratify the societal values, structures, and expectancies--indeed, that he can be expected to violate these in the interest of a higher order, viz. "reconciliation" [=restoration of relationship].

2. Did YS "repent"? At least superficially, (1) in admitting his hunger and (2) in acting to satisfy his hunger in spite of shame and guilt [sin against Father and father]. But YS, being incidental to the story, is not fleshed out and is--in comparison with the father--a rather wooden, straightman character, serving chiefly to reveal the father-Father's character more fully than does the other straightman, OS (the older son).

3. In my #952, Tom Boomershine has episoded the passage into 11 recital-units which his "recital criticism" makes luminous in the process of people's learning to recapitulate the storytelling experience....For years, I've used a role-play this way: in group, a person sits at will on three paper plates [marked as follows: one "YS," one "OS," and one "F"(ather)], and drama time being brunch the day after the bash--the F plate being the most difficult to act. [I adapted this process-technique from my experience of the "hot seat" with Fritz Perls.]....A recent experience of mine, of the spirit of OB, was confronting in federal court government lawyers at all four levels [city, county, state, federal] who were seeking, and failed, to deny public assistance to a family of six [Stevens v Berger, opinioned Mar/77].

4. The "integrated" human being and society are both OS and YS, and the church needs both dogged-daily faithfulness and risktaking spontaneity--but humility-repentance on both sides of the balance. The driving engine of NT motivation, in contrast to that of the pillars of the then-and-now society, was gratitude to God for his gracious patience, persistent love-in-action, powerful beneficence [resurrection and martyrial courage]. Jesus means us to focus neither on OS's dutifulness or resentment nor on YS's profligacy or penitence, but on the divine eager-mercy, as in his "Stop being afraid, little children! God wants to give you the kingdom!" [L.12.32]

5. To exposit the truth that God's generosity is prodigal whenever there's any desire for a restored relationship, I wrote this for the passage for the Kirkridge lectionary the week of 20Mar77: "We are made not just for ourselves or each other but for the whole love potential of the universe and beyond. A prodigal Love has made and sustained us, weeps when our love is small and selfish, and welcomes us when we are humble and hungry for the feast of forgiveness."

6. As in so much else of Jesus' teaching, we have here not exaggeration but dramatic heightening--of insult, of sin, of alienation, of beneficent response. Jesus was no cool teacher!

7. Preaching, teaching, counseling involves perpetual balancing and adjudication of the polar values the two siblings represent: duty/risk, discipline/spontaneity, freedom/order, faithfulness/adventure, collective/individual rights/responsibilities; Johan/Marianne [in Bergman's "Scenes from a Marriage"]. [See Stevens v Berger!]