

## “Paradise Found/ Paradise Lost”

March 10th 2013, 4th Sunday in Lent

Scriptures: II Corinthians 5:16-21 and Luke 15:1-3, 11b-32

As a chaplain in the military particularly in active duty, most commands learned relatively soon that if you invited Chaplain Kahl to a party, number one, he will be there, number two, you can count on him to really enjoy it and enjoy it responsibly, number three, unless if it's a safety issue Chaplain Kahl will allow you to have fun too. There were quite a few parties I was never invited to, I think it was usually either the responsibly thing or the safety issue thing..., and I also have seen lots of places and met lots of people throughout the world that I truly feel blessed by because I was open to go out and enjoy myself with others. I considered this an essential part of a ministry of presence, other chaplains never did and never will and that's ok.

But then I start to think of the parable today... I think of a young man striking out on his own prematurely, without what we would call in the navy and the marines a good liberty buddy. Disaster strikes, he loses all he had. I mean this story has it all! Its surely ready for sweep week on the tube today. There's a lust for adventure, there's loose women, there's heavy drinking, there's probably a few reality T.V. Hijinks that makes that show I can't name from the pulpit child's play, and yes, there's even pig's slop! Yet, as things get worse and time also marches on and his dad stays up long nights wondering if he will ever see him again. Have you ever been there? Even for a little while, you know how he felt. But perhaps unlike you and I this father waits expectantly for the moment his son realizes he made a bad choice, you can envision a father like that praying that his sons misfortune does not get him killed, that he will learn from it all. That he will then see his son and rather than prepare his belt this father chooses to focus on the value of the son lost and the joy of his expected return.

Just like dads today though, it seems that both his sons did not have a clue about their own father's heart. I find that fascinating don't you. But again as a

son and a father it makes a lot of sense, I have been there too many times in many ways. So just when you think it's the Oedipus complex and it's the prodigal son gets much worse than time out, it's forgiveness, it's love without prerequisites, it's above all relief that this son even though he lost his inheritance is alive and well. And most shocking of all its party time! To Jesus this is truly not only a paradox but it's a preview of paradise. And at this point in the story I hope you still can shed a tear of joy. I hope you feel the overwhelming sense of relief. I hope you can say you have been in that boy's shoes. Because if you never have done wrong in your own eyes and you think that you have nothing to be forgiven of, you never had a moment you were sweating in your shoes before the Father, you make think you've been to paradise, but like the song says, you couldn't have, at least I don't think so, because you haven't been to you.

Now finally comes the point of the parable; the other son, the true prodigal. He is the true prodigal, because he does not only not know his father, when he sees his father as he really is he is nothing less than loathing his love and his mercy and his joy. He is the true prodigal because he is so good he is detached, he is conceited, he has nothing to relate to in his father and his brother, he is without true joy. He is the true prodigal because he has been invited to a party to share the joy of the family. His dad loves him dearly too, but he turns his back on his brother, he turns his back on his father, and he turns his back on paradise. The paradise his brother has finally found. The paradise that awaits us all if we face our God, if we face Jesus, if we recognize we not only admire the Spirit we need the Spirit. And it's not just any type of Spirit I am talking about here. It's the Spirit of truth (being real with who we really are, sins and all), the Spirit of love (loving who God is and recognizing the precious price of God's love, love all that and who God loves, notice I didn't say loves God), and it's the Spirit of God's Grace (knowing that we only find paradise when we discover joy and that we only discover joy when we see ourselves for who we are and see others for who they are and see god as God is, and we can't do that until we live, breathe, and have our being wrapped up completely in God's grace).

So, we have before us more than a parable but a mirror. You have just been invited to the party, what's your expression? Is it joyful, or sullen, is it open glad

to be asked or trying to figure out a way to weasel out of it, do you act like you belong to God wherever you are and do you belong to the ones God has given you to share your life with? In short which prodigal are you, the one who gains paradise when he thought all was lost or the one who lost paradise because he needed something other than joy.