

Kirby Lawrence Hill

Abington Presbyterian Church

March 31, 2019

2 Corinthians 5:16-21

Luke 15:1-3;11b-32

## MISSIVES

(A Dramatic reading with two voices, Second Son and Father)

Second Son:

24<sup>th</sup> Year, Second Moon, Third Day –

Dear Diary:

I know I come from privilege, but I imagine there must be something more enticing beyond the home life I have known. I want to stretch my wings. I want to live large. I want to party! And I do not want to wait and wait for what eventually will be mine. Papa has been good to me, but I don't think I can live up to his expectations of me, his hopes for me. It's all too much sometimes. I'm not like his number one son, nor do I want to be, that stick in the mud, color-within-the-lines so-called brother of mine. If I am going to be a disappointment to the family, I might as well enjoy it! I need, I need, I need some space! But what good is space if I have no money to throw around? But as I think about it - I do have a way to get money. I have my whole inheritance waiting for me to demand it, and demand it I will.

(Six days later)

24<sup>th</sup> Year, Second Moon, Ninth Day –

Dear Diary:

Well, it took me a bit to work up my gumption, but I did it. I asked for what would be mine. Papa did not complain about giving it to me. I didn't really want to imply that I just as soon would have him be dead so that I could get my stuff and move away. I've been separating myself emotionally from Papa in preparation for the literal separation. But the act is done and now there is no going back. I tried not to look at him, but I got just a glimpse of his eyes. There was the same sadness in them as when Mama died.<sup>1</sup> But I can't think about that

now – I won't think about that now. I've got a wad of cash and I'm hitting the road.

(four years later)

28<sup>th</sup> Year, Sixth Moon, Twenty-Third Day –

Dear Diary:

I haven't written down my thoughts very much recently – I actually haven't done much thinking. It's fun being the life of the party – buying drinks for everyone. I do wonder if these friends will still hang around when I no longer fill all of their wine glasses. They have expectations of me that I will sink to their level and I guess I've actually met those expectations. The cheap pleasures I've enjoyed still have a cost, in money and more. I never thought I would blow through my cash so fast. I never thought I would - I try to go from party to party so I don't have to focus on the dull ache deep within me. I wonder at times how things are back home, but I know I've burned the bridge to the way home with a very hot fire. (Father comes forward; second son turns his back toward his father).

Father:

My Dear, dear Son:

Yes, I still consider you my son. How I wish I could deliver this letter to you. My heart reaches out to you – I wish you could somehow sense that. I guess I wanted more for you than you wanted for yourself. I'm not talking about material stuff – I'm talking about life stuff – being where you truly belong and being the best you can be that is most fulfilling for you. If you have found that elsewhere, I am happy for you, but I have my doubts that things are good for you out there. I stare at the dusty road by which you left, and I dream of you coming back. I don't want you to ever think that my love for you would die, even though you have done things I wish you had not. You have the right to reject my love, but you do not have the power to extinguish it.

Longingly,

Your ever-loving Papa

(2 and ½ years later)

Second Son:

31<sup>st</sup> year, First Moon, Twelfth night –

Dear Diary:

There is a strange eclipse of the moon this night. There is no light from above and it feels almost as if the sun won't rise tomorrow. I in my role as the big spender find myself completely spent – my friends no longer come around. I thought I could find some decent work to keep body and soul together. But with the drought that brought the famine, every good possibility has dried up and blown away. So, I now feed pigs and I long even to eat the seed pods I give them. I guess the only benefit of sinking this low is that it wouldn't really be a further lowering of myself to head back where I once had a home. I cannot go back as a son – I know that can't be, but perhaps I could work as a hired hand. Eating crow and then something a little more substantial would be significantly better than this.

Father:

My Dear Wife:

Here I am once again standing at your grave. I acted in an undignified way yesterday, but I don't think you would blame me. Multiple times every day, since the day our younger son left, I would stare at the road longing to see him coming back. It happened yesterday. I don't know if I was happier on the day of his birth or on this day of his return. Perhaps the latter, because I thought that what I had longed for would never happen. While sitting on the front porch, I saw a figure coming in the distance. It sort of looked like our boy. I spilled my tea and I knocked over my chair as I leapt from the porch to run in that direction. As I drew closer, I saw it was he, but he was in a pitiful condition. My heart went out to him faster than my legs would carry the rest of me. He started saying to me, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son." He called me 'Father.' Being a loving parent was all I've ever wanted to be for him. He's known loss – none worse than your death. I couldn't protect him from that. I'm sure he had rehearsed his little speech, but I

wasn't interested in why he felt he wasn't worthy to be called our son. I was only interested in celebrating that he was alive and allowing him to begin to heal physically and emotionally from whatever turmoil he had experienced. I pressed his head into my chest and wrapped my arms around his bony body. I was so thankful that he felt like he could come back to the place he had willingly left. Will we reach full reconciliation? (pause) I don't know what he will need in order to feel fully at home here, but I will do all within my power to enable that to happen.

Meanwhile, our firstborn threw a pretty good tantrum last night. He couldn't believe that after his brother had been living a party that I would want to throw him another one. But this party was a feast of forgiveness, and I so relished in throwing it. Our son who had stayed home all these years, wouldn't come in the house. He wouldn't even call the one we had lost his 'brother' – he just referred to him as 'this son of yours.' To his credit, his love for me caused him to feel offense that his little brother had caused me pain. As you knew, our older son had always done everything I had ever asked of him, but his service in recent years has seemed to be done so he could, at least in his mind, wag his finger at his little brother. The music has long been playing for our firstborn, but he just won't dance. I have tried to teach him to have a generous heart, but he has resisted me in that regard about as much as his little brother did in other ways.

Of course, I threw a big party to celebrate our younger one's return and to help others enter into that joy. I went out pleading with our eldest to physically and emotionally come into the party. He said he had never disobeyed any of my commands – I guess he didn't consider this to be one of them. I wasn't going to force him. I would never compel either of our offspring to return my deep love for them. My dear, I feel as if our firstborn's heart has now left home and I long for him to bring it back where it can experience the healing it needs. I am ready to forgive him too. I so want full reconciliation to take place, but the bitterness he is holding in his clenched fist keeps him from opening his heart to his little brother. If I am more than willing to forgive his brother, I must hope that he will get to the point that he can welcome him back as well. If only he could learn the joy in giving one's blessing to another, particularly to one with whom he has been estranged.

My dear, moons will wax and wane, but even in the gloomiest of times, I want our children to shine, bolstered by my love for them. It is within their control in how to respond to that love, but I would willingly give up my very life in order to make it clear to them. They may not always physically be in our home, but I want our love for them to be at home within them, wherever they may be. I want them to feel our embrace even when it is not a physical one. I want them to know their value in my heart is an inheritance that goes far beyond monetary value. I want them to have the capacity to forgive themselves and others as a part of being the best of who they are. I best be going – it is time for my next outreach initiative. There is plenty of work for love to do. There is plenty of work for love to do.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>I suggest that the absence of a female presence in this family is because of the male-dominated inheritance practices of the patriarchal society in which the story arose. Obviously, there would have been a mother for the two sons. Her presence and her described love in this version helps to bring the story into today.

<sup>2</sup>This is a line borrowed from Alexander McCall Smith's Teatime for the Traditionally Built, part of the Number 1 Ladies' Detective Agency series, Anchor, 2010.

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