**Sermon Notes – Finding Your Way Back to God #4 – “Awakening to Love”**

Sermon Notes for January, 2018

***The Journey So Far …***

As we’ve started out in 2018, we’ve been on this journey of “*Finding our Way Back to God.*” As we come back to God (for the first time, or the 100th time), we will go through a series of awakenings. Just a little review on the journey so far:

* ***Slide #1:*** ***First 3 Awakenings:*** 
  + *Awakening to Longing*
    - We all have longings: a longing to be loved; a longing to have purpose; a longing make sense of life. These longings can either drive us toward God/Father, or down other pathways to try and fill our longings. In the Prodigal Son story we see his longings take him far away from his father and his home.
  + *Awakening to Regret*
    - In this awakening, we looked at the fact that so often the paths we choose to fulfill our longings lead us further away from the Father. We end up in the “sorry cycle” – longing and regret; longing and regret. The way out of this cycle is to “come to our senses” and come back to God – to return Home. The Prodigal came to his senses and decided to return home as he woke up knee-deep in pig-slop.
  + *Awakening to Help*
    - Finally, last week we looked at the fact that returning Home to the Father/God requires us to awaken to our need for help. We can’t break free from regret, sin, guilt, addiction, brokenness on our own. The Prodigal knew he needed help and he was finally willing to humble himself and ask for it from his dad.

***The Next Step on the Journey …***

This leads us to where we are today. We have come home. However, even as we return to the Father, our journey is not over. We still have a key reality to awaken to.

* ***Slide #2: Today’s Awakening:***
  + *Awakening to Love*
    - These awakenings are not just something that happens when we initially find our way back to God; finding your way back to God is a life-changing moment, but it’s also a life-growing process, and just because we’re home doesn't’ mean that everything is magically “fixed.” We still need to “***awaken to love*,**” and realize the incredible passion the Father (God) has for us! This fourth awakening is sometimes the most difficult. We can sometimes be content to be a servant in the Father’s house instead of realizing we are a beloved daughter or son.
* ***Slide #3: Show “Testimony Week #4” Video (Rosemarie’s Story)***

Rosemarie’s testimony is so awesome, because I think it probably is the story of many of us in here. Many of you in here have come awake to the fact that only God can fill your longings; you have awakened to regret over your sin and brokenness; and, you’ve even made the decision to get help and come home. But, there is still a sense of shame and a question about the Father’s love.

***The Prodigal Gets a “Wake Up Call” to the Father’s Love …***

This is the perfect point for us to rejoin the prodigal in Luke 15:21-24. He has realized his longings are to be fulfilled in his father’s house. He regrets his wasteful and wild living. He makes a decision to return home and get help. Now, let’s see what happens next.

* ***Slide #4: Luke 15:21-24:*** 
  + **21**“The son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’ **22**“But the father said to his servants, ‘Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. **23**Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let’s have a feast and celebrate. **24**For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’ So they began to celebrate.

Don’t miss what is happening here in the story. This is the *“****Awakening to Love****”* being played out in front of us. Notice what has happened:

* *The son is ready to return and be less*: The son is convinced that his sin is so great that he can’t be called a son again. Instead, he is more than ready to be a servant in his father’s house.
* *The Father wants to fully restore and give his son a “love wake-up call”:* The father races out to meet his son, and quickly shows his returning son and everyone else around that all is forgiven and his love for his son is still as rich as ever.
  + He gives the son a **robe**: the robe is a symbol of covering and rest. The father covers the shame of the son, and he gives him the best robe. Dad’s robe was the best robe. He essentially invites the prodigal back into the full protection, covering, and love expected for a son in his father’s house.
  + He gives the son a **ring**: the ring is a symbol of security and authority. Kings and people in authority had rings. By giving the prodigal a ring, the father was telling him that he was under the rule of the father again, and that he had a position of authority in his father’s house.
  + He gives the son **sandals**: the sandals were a symbol and sign of acceptance. Only the family would wear sandals inside the home in the ANE. This was another symbol that the son was welcomed back without restraint and without hesitation. He was home!

***What About You and Me? …***

The amazing story of the Prodigal is … amazing! But, I fear that far-too-often it is just that: a story. We need to not let it just be the story of a Jewish prodigal in the first-century, it has to become our story! The father in Jesus’ tale is showing us the heart of our Heavenly Father for all of us. Yet, we often awaken to longing, regret, and help, but we are content to live as servants in our Father’s house.

* *2006:* Briefly tell of my story. Depression, despair, and Jeremiah 17:14.

We have to learn this lesson. Often, we have to learn it over and over again. But, the Father is for us! He loves us! We are His beloved children!

* ***Slide #5: You Tube Clip:***
* ***Slide #6:***
  + Define yourself radically as one beloved by God. This is the true self. Every other identity is illusion. God’s love for you and his choice of you constitute your worth. Accept that, and let it become the most important thing in your life. **~ Brennan Manning**

***Simple Steps to Awaken to Love … (Slide #7)***

**Simple Steps to Awaken to Love**

1. Pray: “God, make yourself real to me. Awaken in me the awareness that I am your unconditionally loved child.”

2. Preach: “Why so downcast, O my soul, put your trust in God!” (Psalm 42:11) (TELL YOURSELF THE TRUTH)

3. Perish: “For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God!” (Colossians 3:4) (BAPTISM)

AWAKEN TO LOVE TODAY! We are going to stand and worship. If you need to talk to a prayer counselor, they are waiting for you in the back. Awaken to the love of the Father today.