

Door mats are sold at Walmart, Target, Costco, Sam’s Club, Home Depot, Lowe’s...practically everywhere. My wife and I have both purchased welcome mats at several different stores, which may reflect our different personalities. Here’s a sample of the welcome mats at our house... [see photos]

Some welcome mats simply say: “Wipe your feet please.”

Then there are mats with colorful designs, from “sunbursts” to “autumn colors” to “a rainbow” to Snoopy”, and so on.

A friend and his wife have a mat at their back door which reads: “A Golfer and a Sane Person Live Here.” I think she gave it to him for his birthday. 😊

You also probably decorate the entrances to your home with door mats?!?

What a door mat can do is to say something—perhaps very subtly—to someone coming into your house about you and about those who live in the house.

Based on the parable we read today about the Prodigal Son, what do you think the door mat would say at the entrance of the father’s home?

If...it said something about the younger son who left home?

If...it was saying something about the father?

Or, if...it was saying something about the older son?

Before we get into what these door mats might say, let’s look at the circumstances under which Jesus told this parable. You may have noticed that our reading begins with three verses that are separated from the actual parable of the Lost Son. Those verses help to set the stage for the story.

What was happening that encouraged Jesus to come up with this magnificent story of a son that was lost and eventually found his way home that we have grown to love so much?

Well. Verse 1 states, “*Now the tax collectors and sinners were all gathering around to hear Jesus.*”

Verse 2 goes on, “*But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, ‘This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.’*” Those comments are especially revealing of the audience that Jesus told the parable to on that day. To *mutter*, according to Webster is, “to speak or say something in low or indistinct tones; to grumble.” What a perfect word Luke chose to describe the behavior of Jesus’ detractors.

And the Pharisees and the teachers of the law grumbled about how “Un-Jewish” Jesus was...that Jesus “welcomed them” and “ate with them.”

To the Scribes and Pharisees, there wouldn’t have been much difference between a tax collector and any other “sinner,” except maybe that they had a title, and the others didn’t.

Tax collectors were cheaters, and even cheated their own people...the Jews. They became rich from the “extra” taxes they collected...and they were hated by most Jews.

So, the story in Luke 15 finds Jesus among some pretty “unlikely acquaintances,” and he is enjoying their company. He seemed to relish being with them. I suppose they were a lot more entertaining and fun to be with than those prudish old Pharisees and teachers of the law.

But it wasn’t the fun or the entertainment that drew Jesus to them.

It was his love for them. Love as of the Father...his Father who is in heaven.

The Scribes and Pharisees had no love for tax collectors and sinners. They lived by the motto that “One rotten apple in the barrel can spoil the whole barrel.”

Jesus, however, lived by the motto that “everyone is a child of God, and therefore, worthy of God’s love.

And we remember in John that Jesus speaks of him and the Father as being one with each another. And that he said: “*As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you*” (John 15:9).

This was something hateful to the Scribes and Pharisees because they only loved those *worthy of their love*: those who followed the rules they followed; thought like they thought; and revered the teachings they taught.

This group Jesus was mixing with were RENEGADES. They were scoundrels and misfits. He had no business socializing with them!!

This is the setting in which the parable of the Prodigal Son is first told.

- People who squandered their lives in frivolity and wasteful living.
- Jesus welcomed them with arms wide open.
- And, the Scribes and Pharisees griped and moaned that this was an intentional act to “snub” them.

In this context, the story says something interesting about the 1st century religious leaders of the Jewish people.

It also tells us *to whom* Jesus was sent and how unpopular that was among all those who expected that the Messiah would be sent *to them*...if...it was true that he was who he said he was.

It’s clear that the younger son who goes off and squanders everything given to him by his father, and defames the family name in the process, IS THE ONE in the story who represents the tax collectors and sinners.

Jesus plays the part of the father in the story.

And, by now, you can surmise that the Pharisees and the teachers of the law are the older son.

We can see how the father and the older son interacted with one another, and how each felt about and thus related to the younger son.

In this story, Jesus raises a question for all who hear: We have the Pharisees and the teachers of the law on the one hand; and we have Jesus on the other.

“Which one represents God’s calling of his people Israel?”

- Is it the Pharisees and the teachers of the law who mutter and pronounce judgment on the people they see as *unworthy and unfit*?
- Or is it Jesus who lovingly welcomes them with open arms?
- What is God’s real purpose for sending Jesus?

One Apostle and theologian put it this way: “*God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people’s sins against them*” (2 Corinthians 5:19).

Is that God’s mission for his church? How are we doing with that mission?

What does our door mat say about us and our mission?

Does it proclaim a warm welcome to all?

Or does it imply that you’re welcome...if...you meet our expectations?

Jesus was all about God’s mission. Are we?

Amen!

(Thanks to Joseph Robb for sermon suggestions)