

Rev. Dr. Yugo Suzuki's Sermon

3/14/10 **"The Elder Brother of the Prodigal Son" Luke 15: 1-3, 11b-32**

The parable of the prodigal son has a second part to it. It has to do with his elder brother.

The story goes like this. On the way back from the fields, the elder brother hears the sound of music and dancing. A dinner party is going on. He finds out that it is to celebrate the return of his younger brother who spent many wasteful years in a far off country. He has come back as a broken and desperate man.

When the elder brother learns the reason for the celebration, he refuses to join in. After all, he has been working hard for his father, while his brother was living a life of corruption. The elder brother protests to his father, "I deserve a big dinner party, not him. Father, where is your sense of fairness?"

The father replies, "Son, listen. This brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found. That is why we celebrate. Come and join us."

What does this story tell us? First, the Father is God. Second, God's compassion is infinite. When we repent, God forgives. Third, God's absolute and unbounded love contradicts our sense of fairness.

Fourth, the elder brother symbolizes all of us, because we want God to behave according to our sense of fairness. We are often like the elder brother who says, "My brother does not deserve a welcome party. Chase him away and hold a dinner party for me."

But let us not forget one thing. The father's love extends to the grumbling elder brother. God loves us even when we complain, even when we refuse to join in the dinner party, even when we turn our backs to him. God waits patiently for us.

Now do you notice one more important thing? That is this story has no proper ending to it. We are not told whether the elder brother continued to refuse his father's invitation or finally accepted his invitation and joined in the party.

Why? That is Jesus' way of saying that you and I are responsible for putting our own conclusion to the story. Will we stubbornly stand at the gate or enter the gate? Will we say, "Yes" to God's invitation or will we say, "No thank you? The answer is left to you and me.

Let us put the right conclusion to the end of the story. Let us say, "Yes" to God's invitation.

Our hope rests in God whose patience has no end. God in Jesus Christ never gives up on us. That is good news, indeed.

Thanks be to God.