

Cindy Bassett

The Bible Corner



The prodigal son

Before he had even entered Meyer and Son Paint and Hardware store, Joseph could see Papa standing there behind the counter. The old man was like a worn-out fixture, a part of the goods that had been meticulously lined up for sale like one of the numerous row houses in Brooklyn.

The "and Son" part of the ownership was relatively new. Seven years was a relatively brief period in the history of an establishment that had existed for almost 50 years. There was much more to the family business than paint and hardware. In this building was the very core of Papa's life. He'd probably pass quietly away one day standing behind that counter. And who would call Sam and tell him? Certainly not his brother, Joseph.

"Good morning, Papa," Joseph called out as he entered.

No reply. The old man stared vacantly, his mind fixed on some faraway thought.

"Papa, what is it?"

His father made eye contact with Joseph now, yet still seemed unable to comprehend his son's question.

"Papa?" Joseph repeated. "Is something wrong?"

"It's Sammy," Papa finally said. "My son is coming home! Your brother will be here in Brooklyn tomorrow."

"I have no brother," Joseph replied cold-

ly, his jaw set firmly as he headed for the back room.

"Lots of work to do today," Joseph said, deliberately changing the subject as he came back onto the floor. "You watch the counter, Papa. I'll see to everything else. And Papa," Joseph added, before disappearing down one of the store aisles. "Could you try not to give away half of our merchandise today to those cheap friends of yours?"

"The regulars of Meyer's," Joseph thought with disdain. "A steady stream of Papa's old cronies that come to mooch."

"You'll pay next time," Papa always said.

"Papa," Joseph protested, "you don't make money in business by giving things away. Tell them to go to the Salvation Army if they want something for free."

"Joseph, you worry about such small things," said his father. "These are good people I've known for over 40 years."

"I know, Papa," Joseph replied. "You all started in America together."

These days, Joseph was worried about more than just small things. One of the national paint and hardware stores was opening in Brooklyn soon, and he wondered if Meyer and Son would survive. This store was, after all, his inheritance.

"This is all Sam's fault," he remembered, frowning.

A second mortgage placed on the business seven years before was draining away all of the profits. Papa had foolishly consented to

give Sam his inheritance. And why? So Sam could go out to California and squander the money on a stupid acting dream.

"It's just a good thing I was smart enough to have Papa fix things," Joseph thought smugly. "If Sam thinks he can just come back here and take over — I won't stand for it!"

Sam, though the younger of the two brothers, had always been the more daring and flamboyant when they were growing up. Every Thursday afternoon was showtime at Meyer's. Sam would perform some silly routine for the neighborhood customers. Papa was always lavish in his praise.

"And I would see to everything," Joseph brooded.

It had always been this way with Papa and Sam. When Sam first went to California, he wrote often. Joseph never read any of his letters. He didn't have to. The day after a letter came, Papa repeated every detail to all of the regulars at Meyer's.

One time, when Sam had a small part in a commercial, Papa was sure a new Cary Grant had been born.

"Papa," Joseph asked suddenly, "were you ever proud of me?"

"Every day of your life," said Papa, without a moment's hesitation.

"You never told me," Joseph stammered.

"It's always been Sam with you."

"Joseph, what's this all about? I have always loved both of my sons. Everything I have in this world belongs to both of you."

"Does that mean that when Sam comes, you'll give him your part of the business?" asked Joseph, coming right to the point.

"Your brother is down on his luck," Papa began.

"Is that my fault?" Joseph shouted, not wanting his father to continue. "Sam chose

to leave and go make his life elsewhere. He didn't care anything about us. I've stuck by you all of this time. And now it means nothing!"

"We are Sam's family. And he will not be turned away," Papa said with an air of finality.

"I hate Sam!" Joseph cried and stalked off.

Joseph didn't speak to his father for the rest of the day. The only conversation was between Papa and the Meyer's regulars. Over and over, Papa said proudly, "My son comes home tomorrow!" He repeated it until Joseph thought he would choke.

At closing time, Papa walked over to where Joseph was working and said, "It's not Sam's fault about the business. Things change. What has happened would have been the same, with or without your brother here."

Silence. Joseph went home then and planted himself in a chair in the living room, where he remained all night. Memories of Sam came flooding back from deep inside, where he had buried them the day his brother left for California.

In the morning, Joseph headed for the airport alone. When Sam's flight landed at Laguardia, Joseph ran all the way down the corridor to meet his brother.

For Further Reading:

The story of the prodigal son is found in Luke, Chapter 15:11-32.

Meditation for Lent:

Dear Jesus, transform my stumbling block of unforgiveness into a steppingstone of reconciliation, especially with those people who are closest to me in my life.

Upcoming day of reflection at St. Anne's Parish in Palmyra will focus on sanctity of human life

A day of reflection to consider the sanctity of human life is scheduled for St. Anne's Parish Center, West Jackson and Canandaigua Streets, Palmyra, on Saturday, April 4, from 9:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m.

Father Anthony Mugavero of St. Theodore Church in Rochester, formerly of St. Mary's of the Lake in Ontario, will present the keynote lecture, entitled "Choose Life." His talk will link human life issues with a consistent pro-life attitude and ethic.

Three other issues to be addressed are abortion, euthanasia and nuclear war.

Donald Peters, who with his wife, Kathy, coordinates the Geneva-area Right to Life organization, will speak on the problem of abortion. They are members of St. Mary's Church in Waterloo.

Father Donald Schwab, chaplain at Rochester General Hospital, will discuss the topic of euthanasia. Carol Crossed, a member of Blessed

Sacrament Parish who coordinates the Rochester Chapter of Pro-Lifers for Survival, will speak on the topic of nuclear war.

The gathering is co-sponsored by the social ministry committees of four parishes in western Wayne County and by the Finger Lakes Office of Social Ministry in Geneva. The four parishes are St. Anne's Church in Palmyra, St. Gregory's Church in Marion, St. Patrick's Church in Macedon, and St.

Mary's of the Lake Church in Ontario.

Participants should bring a brown-bag lunch. Refreshments will be served. Child care is available during the keynote and workshop sessions. A \$2 donation will be requested at the door.

For information, contact Patricia Schmitt in Palmyra at (315)597-9787, evenings, or Christopher Grannis at the Finger Lakes Office of Social Ministry at (315)789-2686.

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