

## **The Prodigal's Mother** **Women's World Day of Prayer**

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March 3, 1995  
Luke 15:11-32

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I greet you in the name of our God, El Shaddai. And in the name of this God I am going to tell you my story. As far as I know you are the first ever to hear it-- the first to wonder about me - to ask - or to care what the answer would be. Perhaps I've misjudged though -- assuming that you care.... we will see.

If you've ever thought about my existence before it would have been in my role as wife and mother -- and that is how I come to you today, but I need you to know 2 things:

1) There is more to me than being a wife and mother

1. I have a name – I am Deborah

My name is Deborah -- and I am the mother of the prodigal son. I want to tell you how it was for me -- how this family drama that is as old as time and as new as each new family - how it seems from where I stand and perhaps in the telling you will find your way home.

My children have always been a very important part of my life ... in some ways my greatest joy, and in others, my deepest sorrow. If you are a mother or a father I think you will know what I mean.

My first born was a daughter -- I called her Dinah for reasons I will tell you if you ask me ... and I have other daughters as well ... but this story is about my sons. There are 2 sons in the family -- different as day and night from the moment they were born. You know how it can be that way with children? Same parents, same family - how could they be so different? But they are. Always were.

The older of the two - a good boy. Never any trouble - serious - always did what he was told. I very rarely had to discipline him - and when I did, it was usually for being too hard on his brother who was younger, and - how shall I say this - less inclined to work.

Most people would tell you my oldest son was sullen - that he can't communicate with people. I know different. It's true he's no talker - but he talks to me. From the time he was little I'd go in at night (as I did with all my children) - I'd go in at night and talk to him before bed. Often I'd have to drag it out of him - but once he got going he'd talk and talk - full of feelings and hopes and dreams. Such dreams' all come spilling out as I told him a story or asked how his day had been.

I wanted so much for him to be able to share himself with others like that - especially his father - but it just never happened. I wanted people to see in my son what I saw when I looked at him.

The younger of the two – I just have to smile when I think of him. (He's home now, you know!) He made us all laugh - always a joke, always a story to tell or a prank to pull and you'd just have

to laugh even if sometimes you wanted to be angry with him. He too would tell me - without any coaxing at all - how he felt, his plans, his fears, his dreams - such dreams! As he got older I worried about his sense of responsibility... you can't get by forever on a charming personality and a quick comeback ... but more often than not he'd kiss me on the cheek and say "you worry too much, mom" before running Out the door to join his friends. And when he'd come home again (usually too late) he'd probably bring me a huge bouquet of flowers or something delicious - "Enjoy them," he'd say, "life's short".

What bothered me a lot about both of them was their relationship with their father.

I wanted them to be close to him - but somehow they never were. Our oldest worked along side him on the land from the time he could help feed the animals..., and it always seemed to me that working side by side like that, long days in the fields - should lead to some pretty deep sharing - but it never seemed to happen. They worked alright together but didn't know each other - you know, as people. Say "Talk to your father. Tell him how you feel". He couldn't do it.

I'd say "Talk to your son - tell him how you feel", He'd say, "He knows how I feel. At least he should".

With the younger it was the same. They liked each other - and my husband really enjoyed the jokes and carrying on - but somehow it never got deeper than that even though both of them longed for it.

When that boy asked for his inheritance and left home it nearly killed us. I don't know if any of you have experienced that - the pain of a child who rejects you and everything you stand for (at least that's the way it feels) and goes off to do who knows what with who knows whom - in spite of everything you tried to teach or give...it hurts a lot.

A house is empty when someone who belongs there is missing. My husband never got over it. He withdrew - from me, from everyone. And he wouldn't talk about it. "I'm just fine" he'd say - but I saw the sadness in his eyes and the tension in his body and the way most food started to bother his stomach. It wasn't the food he was having trouble digesting.

Our house became very quiet. My daughters and I, and our servants, were shut out somehow, even more than usual. I tried to keep peace - not to upset him any more than he already was (looking back on it now I realize that no one ever in all of this - no one ever asked me how I was - what pain I was going through - not even me. I tended to everyone else's pain and tried to keep the house running smoothly for their sakes). My own pain I dealt with - some with my daughters who were missing their brother and needing me too - but mostly outside our house with a couple of good friends. They'd listen and make me tea. A house is empty when someone who belongs there is missing.

In my heart I always believed he'd come home. Often, with young folks learning to grow up these things happen. They're painful - and they take time.

He's home now - what rejoicing' And our oldest is have to do some hard thinking of his own. I don't know what the future holds for him - but the drama of our family goes

on. What still causes me pain is that in all the talk of inheritance, peace in the family, and their father's love - my daughters are still left out. I'm glad my son is home and back to his rightful place - don't get me wrong. That makes me happier than I can say. But my daughters are my children too and they never had an inheritance to waste, never had a place - a real place - in this house. A house empty when someone who belongs there is missing.

There's more than one way to be missing. Who is missing in your house? What about your household of faith? at (I mean the church.) Who's missing? In your church today - who, like my son, have run away to waste the rich inheritance they've been given? What will be the response when they come back home because they need you? Who are those who like my oldest son, have the largest share of the inheritance anyway but begrudge the celebration when others begin to come home? Who, like my daughters, and because of society's structures, have never had their rightful place and still don't? What about me? Where do I fit into this house?

Where is God and what is God's activity? When the household of faith is not complete? When some are missing? Where is God in that?

One thing I know for sure - there will be a homecoming. We can hope for it, but we can also work toward it. And on that day when the whole household sits at the table together, with enough for everyone and no empty places. The joy of our God El Shaddai will complete. Amen.