

It began with grumbling – like so many stories in the Bible. Let's be honest, like so many of our stories when we get to talking about our lives. Jesus was no stranger to grumbling, in fact, it was a family tradition.

Moses listened to his share for 40 years in the desert – the food, the water, the heat, the lack of directions, the God who they never saw. Grumble, grumble. Admittedly, wilderness – that place where expectations are crushed - tends to bring out the grumble in all of us.

So when the religious elites began grumbling at Jesus – this time because they didn't like who he invited to dinner – it was not only an old story, it was a family story as well. The people of Israel were God's people – they learned that at Mt. Sinai – and although it meant putting up with endless meals of manna – it also meant they were special; not everyone was to be counted among the worthy. The VIPs in the crowd were making sure the riff raff were kept out.

Before we get all self-righteous, let us remember that those who consider themselves religious insiders today: the faithful, the regular Sunday worship attendees, tend to grumble about the same things today. About who is worthy to eat at the table, who is allowed to proclaim the good news, who is considered one of us.

So, Jesus tells us a story about a family in crisis – a father and two sons plus slaves and hired hands and probably some women along the way.

It begins with the younger son – in a hurry to live life to the fullest – for which he needs his share. His entitlement. His portion of what sustained his father's life...so he could do his own thing, be his own person. Ahh, the wonder of youth. I just might recognize a bit of myself there.

Of course he ended up in a wilderness – in his case without funds, food, family or friends. Not only had he wasted the life which he hadn't valued enough, ...he now found himself in danger of dying.

So he comes to himself and turns toward home – perhaps he's repentant. Perhaps he's just manipulative. Doesn't matter because Dad is waiting and watching and ready to celebrate – no questions asked.

But welcoming back this wastrel revealed the wilderness that held the older son captive. Coming in from the fields he hears the party noises and his grumbling begins - about how he never got his share, he never got a party, and he worked all the time.

Good old reliable Older Son took his stand in his wilderness of resentment and envy, and just as quickly as his kid brother, he rejects his father and family in the name of justice for himself. What the younger son wasted, the older son hoarded, a miser with the same last name. I might see a bit of myself in this picture as well.

The father got one son back just in time for the other to wander far from the fold. Each son forgot the family story, forgot who the father was and therefore, who they were.

But what the Father saw was family – albeit broken, resentful and cranky, embarrassed and embarrassing – but family just the same. So, a feast is prepared to mend what is broken, to bring the wanderers back together, to begin again.

And everyone is invited to the feast – the wasteful n-er-do-wells and the self-righteous misers and every version of broken, wilderness wandering person in between.

Come to the table, the Father says. Sit down face to face. Pass the platters. Patch things up – not with the Father but with your brothers and sisters, nieces and nephews, cousins and aunts. S

Share the potatoes and cut enough pieces of the pie so everyone gets a piece. Look to your left and your right: this is family – your

family and each of us brings both better and worse to the table with us.

Come to the table, the Father beseeches. All weapons to be left outside. Complaints and grievances suspended so you might see one another with clear eyes and recognize that we are **all victims of our own selfishness and wounded by the selfishness of others**. Aren't we all offspring of the same creator? Don't we have the same needs and wants? To be loved, to be sheltered, to belong?

Come to the table that Christ has prepared for us. Hear again the story of a God who so loved the world – every race or gender, every criminal, every loving mother and every lost child, every white supremacist, every non binary person, every divorced, widowed, single, rich and poor person. There's a place at the table for you with all your warts – along with all the other wart infested toads of this world.

Come to the table. It is time to reconcile with one another, to fess up to our broken parts and then pass the stuffing to the broken person on our right. It is time to begin the healing of the nations by binding up the wounds of the brothers. It is time to accept that the Father might be right this time: both sons are worthy of love, both sons are a celebration, both sons have a place at the table.

Our feast is simple: just bread and wine but it Jesus' offering poured out in order to reconcile the world to the creator and to give all of us a place to reconcile with one another.

Step out of your wilderness and up to this table, become a part of the body of Christ and begin the work of healing – yourself and those around you. Reconciled through Christ.

Today we celebrate with a feast, as we must, because, as the Father says, your brother was lost and now is found.

Hear the good news: so are you.

