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Welcome back Michael Vick

Michael Sean Winters | Aug. 14, 2009 NCR Today

If there are four more powerful biblical words than "A man had two sons" I do not know them. I always cry when I read them. Coming after the other two parables about hope, the parable of the lost sheep and the parable of the lost coin, and appearing only in the Gospel of Luke, the parable of the prodigal reveals to us in a way that we find difficult to understand, even unnerving, what the Master was about to accomplish for the entire human race on Calvary: The triumph of absolute merciful love over sin and even over justice. Justice is one of the most noble accomplishments of the human soul, and it is difficult to attain, but it is as nothing compared to the mercy of God.

I hope that Michael Vick has read that parable many times.

Vick, you will recall, was suspended from the NFL and sent to prison for extreme and wanton cruelty to animals. He has served his sentence and we are told that he has genuinely come to understand what a terrible thing he did. Animal cruelty strikes us humans so forcefully because animals by definition are not morally responsible for themselves so we must be responsible for them. For someone in the public eye, Vick now has the obligation to share with any and all what his conversion has entailed and demonstrate all that a changed heart, and only a changed heart, can reveal to a jaded humanity. There will be joy if we see that he has turned around, as the prodigal did. Please, no jokes about killing the fatted calf.

I am biased here. The photo that accompanies my posts had to be cropped to fit, but you can just make out to splotches of black. That is fur and it belongs to two of my beasts, Bernie and Clementine, a black lab mutt from a rescue in Maryland and a border collie mutt from a rescue in Tennessee. Since that photo was taken, our family has grown with the addition of a Saint Bernard, Ambrose, from a rescue in Kansas. A friend tells me that I treat my dogs better than most people treat their friends. If there is a thunderstorm, I sleep on the sofa so they won?t be alone in their fear. They get special human food in all their dinners. They get belly rubs whenever they want them. They, for their part, provide me with an unconditional love that is not so easy to find in the human world and which, frankly, should not be so easy to find in a human world. Human relationships should come with strings and boundaries and expectations. For Bernie, Clementine and Ambrose, it is enough to see Daddy walk through the door.

So, welcome back Mr. Vick and good luck. We will be watching. And hoping.

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