

Sins of the father

New Fox drama is police procedural and family drama combined

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TV Media

As most viewers are probably aware, the Parable of the Prodigal Son comes from the Bible. It's a culturally transcendent tale about a wayward child who returns home after many years to a shockingly welcome reunion. The story has been reworded, reimagined and retold many times in books, movies and television, but never quite like this.

The new Fox series "Prodigal Son" premieres Monday, Sept. 23, and in this case, "prodigal" doesn't imply that the son was reckless, wasteful and extravagant, like he was in the source material. This time it just means that he's not a serial killer.

British actor Tom Payne ("The Walking Dead") plays Malcolm Bright, a criminal profiler whose life and career choices have been heavily influenced by the traumatic events of his childhood. A-list Welsh actor Michael Sheen ("Good Omens") plays Martin, Malcolm's father and the cause of all that trauma — he just happens to be an infamous serial killer.

If you're not sure how a biblical tale of unconditional love and acceptance can be used as a jumping-off point for a series about a possibly unstable profiler with a criminally insane father, you'll need to tune in to find out.

I can admit to prejudging this series when I first heard about it. I can't be the only person who hears the words "serial killer" and "TV drama" and immediately thinks of the long-running, Golden Globe-winning series "Dexter," despite that show having ended more than six years ago. "Prodigal Son" however, does not try to be "Dexter." It's an original story that has intrigued me more and more as I've learned more about it.

Sheen's Martin is a seemingly deranged serial killer known as "The Surgeon," who



Lou Diamond Phillips stars in "Prodigal Son"

was locked up when Malcolm was just a boy. As a direct result of his strange and horrifying childhood, Malcolm takes an interest in law enforcement as an adult, particularly criminal psychology. He becomes a very successful profiler, thanks to his ability to "think like a killer."

Unfortunately for Malcolm, his talent is eclipsed by the fear that the apple may not have fallen far from the tree, and the FBI lets him go. Instead, he's picked out by an NYPD agent named Gil, who is played by screen veteran Lou Diamond Phillips ("Longmire"). Unfortunately for Malcolm's sanity, Gil seems to have chosen him because of his unsavory connections, not despite them.

A copycat serial killer has emerged, and the perpetrator is copying "The Surgeon." Malcolm is forced to meet with his father, which brings memories of his traumatic childhood flooding back. He's worked his whole life to ensure that people like his father are caught and incarcerated, so why the title "Prodigal Son?"

Well, Martin seems to think that he and his son are exactly the same, and that once Malcolm accepts his true nature, the father and son can build a wonderful relationship like the one they had when Malcolm was a child, before Martin was locked up for being a homicidal maniac. It is the relationship between father and son that

really drives this series. Though Malcolm is loathe to admit it, he and Martin really connect. There is still a bond between the two that cannot be denied.

While the circumstances are extreme, "Prodigal Son" combines its serial killer-centric storyline with elements of a family drama. Rounding out this beyond-dysfunctional family is Halston Sage ("The Orville") as Payne's spoiled sister and Bellamy Young ("Scandal") as Payne's mother — Fox has put together a team of actors who have earned their stripes on the small screen, proven dramatic stars that keep the show compelling. This series has a real shot at becoming television gold, and

I (along with Fox executives) am hoping that it lives up to its potential.

If you have yet to watch any of the great trailers for "Prodigal Son," they're a good place to start in preparation for the series premiere. The costumes, set design and color correction of the show evoke the 1991 Oscar-winning film "The Silence of the Lambs," and that's without taking into consideration flashbacks to meetings between the boy and his father, who is chained up just like Dr. Hannibal Lecter himself.

There are some dark and even gruesome moments in these trailers, though — the series might not be great for the faint of heart or weak of stom-

ach. As Malcolm struggles to come to terms with his complex feelings about his father, he admits that what he is truly terrified of is himself. Can the apple fall far from the tree? And did it? As Malcolm contemplates whether he has the capacity to become the man his father insists he will be, viewers are taken on a thrilling ride full of murder, psychological turmoil and family drama. I'm such a sucker for a good psychological thriller, and with a phenomenal cast, amazing art direction and good production value (plus a pretty "killer" soundtrack), "Prodigal Son" could be the next big thing on TV. Catch the series premiere on Monday, Sept. 23.