

Sermon September 18,2022 Luke 15:11-32

Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him. And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, "This man receives sinners and eats with them."

So he told them this parable: "What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open country, and go after the one that is lost, until he finds it? And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.' Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance. "Or what woman, having ten silver coins, if she loses one coin, does not light a lamp and sweep the house and seek diligently until she finds it? And when she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost.' Just so, I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents." And he said, "There was a man who had two sons. And the younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of property that is coming to me.' And he divided his property between them. Not many days later, the younger son gathered all he had and took a journey into a far country, and there he squandered his property in reckless living. And when he had spent everything, a severe famine arose in that country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed pigs. And he was longing to be fed with the pods that the pigs ate, and no one gave him anything. "But when he came to himself, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have more than enough bread, but I perish here with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants.'" And he arose and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' But the father said to his servants, 'Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet. And bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate. For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.' And they began to celebrate. "Now his older son was in the field, and as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing. And he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant. And he said to him, 'Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fattened calf, because he has received him back safe and sound.' But he was angry and refused to go in. His father came out and entreated him, but he answered his father, 'Look, these many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command, yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him!' And he said to him, 'Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. It was fitting to celebrate and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found.'"

Grace, mercy, and peace be unto you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

The normal Gospel text for this week is Jesus' parable of the shrewd manager in chapter sixteen of Luke's Gospel. However, the parable of the Prodigal Son in chapter fifteen completes and is the culmination of the other parables Jesus taught. Skipping over this parable would be like developing a movie plot and then abruptly ending the film before the completion of the storyline. Therefore, even though we heard this parable back on Sunday, March 27, I am going back to it again.

Luke gives us an important description and explanation of the nature of Jesus' mission in chapter four. Jesus had returned to his hometown of Nazareth. He went

to the synagogue on the Sabbath, as was his custom. He was given a scroll to read and then teach from. Jesus selected a section from Isaiah chapter 61 which reads;

*The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me,
because the Lord has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor;
he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted,
to proclaim liberty to the captives,
and the opening of the prison to those who are bound;
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. Isaiah 61:1-2*

This sums up quite nicely what Jesus came to do. The parable of the Prodigal Son is all about this work that Jesus came to do. Many, like the tax collectors and sinners, responded favorably to the work of Jesus. Others, however, like the Pharisees and Scribes, rejected Jesus' main purpose and what he came to do. In today's parable, Jesus addresses both groups. The tax collectors and sinners are represented by the prodigal son. The elder son in the story is a stand-in for the Pharisees and Scribes. Also, the father in the story can easily be recognized as God the Father. Jesus is in the story, too, but we will get to where he shows up a bit later.

Jesus worked mainly with people who were descended from the house of Abraham. Jesus said he was sent to the lost sheep of Israel. That means the tax collectors, prostitutes, and others who had fallen into unsavory lives were of the tribes of Israel: Jews, Benjamites; etc. In the parable, they are pictured as the father's younger son.

He does not appreciate the laws and traditions. In asking for his share of the inheritance, they will their father dead. When he seeks to sell his inherited property to another member in the community and then take the money and run, the younger son brings shame upon himself, his father, and the entire village. That was NOT the way things were done. He takes the ill-gotten gains, leaves his father's house, goes to a foreign land, and enjoys his new life free from the scruples of his own people, afforded to him by his large bank account. His foolishness brings bankruptcy. He is forced to take a job tending pigs. There is a severe drought. He is starving. He hits bottom. Now comes the first stage of his repentance. He realizes things were actually much better back in his father's house. He had committed unthinkable evil against both his father and his God. He was no longer worthy to be a son. However, perhaps there just might be a place for him in one of the tents of his father's servants. He decides to make the journey back home. Next is the most well-loved and remembered part of the story. As he is still a long way off, his father sees

the younger son, runs to him, and fully reinstates him as a son in his house. That is the perfect picture of repentance! It is a picture for us to follow when we have forsaken the house of our Father in heaven.

The off-put older brother has been showing signs that something was wrong with his relationship in the family for some time. He didn't stop his younger brother from doing the unthinkable. He did not fulfil his role as his brother's keeper. When he described how faithful he had been in his father's service, he explained it in a way that sounded like he did it somewhat begrudgingly. Then he complained that his father never gave him a goat so he could throw his own feast. However, the celebration he had in mind was not with his family, which would have been the norm. He said the feast would be for himself and his friends. Finally, adding insult to injury, he argued with his father in public, at the feast, of which he as eldest son, in that time and place, would have automatically been considered the host. Jesus perfectly portrayed the Pharisees and Scribes – and all others who recoil at the graciousness of God - as this elder brother in the parable. They kept all the rules. They were outwardly obedient. Even so, their hearts were as hard and cold as stone. Jesus is illustrating how he does NOT want us to be.

Someone else Jesus alludes to in this parable is God the Father. How does Jesus picture his Father and ours? Overbearing? Mean? Demanding? Harsh? On the contrary. Jesus pictures the Father with an extraordinary never-seen-on-earth form of kindness. In the story, the father does not push back against the death wish coming from his son. He allows the dividing of the inheritance while he is still alive. Even though the prodigal left on such bad terms, the father is continually watching down the road in the possibility that his wayward son might one day return. Upon his return, he runs down the road and immediately reinstates his son. Then he quickly shields him from the scorn of the village by clothing him with his best robe, shoes, and signatory ring. He kills the fatted calf and declares a feast, to which all the villagers would by custom need to attend. They would also be obliged to celebrate in the spirit of the feast – despite any negative feelings they would still harbor in their hearts toward the prodigal's antics - which was that the father's son was lost but found, dead but now alive. The purpose of the feast was to reconcile his prodigal son with the community. What a beautiful and creative way for Jesus to portray his Father in heaven in the character of this father in the lesson. If we were ever unsure of the Father's willingness to take us back when we have strayed, let there no longer be any doubt after knowing this portrayal of God's grace in the parable.

I mentioned at the start we can also find Jesus in the story. But where? He is not the father. He is neither the younger nor elder son. He is not the foreigner with the pigs. He is not one of the father's servants. Where is Jesus in the story? The clue is in verse 23;

And bring the fattened calf and kill (sacrifice) it, and let us eat and celebrate. Luke 15:23

In our translation it reads that the fatted calf should be killed. Jesus actually says the calf was to be *sacrificed*. In the word used here meaning *sacrifice*, first-century disciples in training would have understood Jesus' suffering, sacrificial death, and the Lord's Supper (which is celebrated in remembrance of the suffering and death of Jesus). We can also understand it in this way, too. We prodigals are reconciled to our Father in heaven and all heaven's company in the fellowship meal of celebration and joy, with Jesus as both the sacrifice and the host on behalf of his Father.

All the parables in this chapter of Luke end with a communal meal of celebration and joy: The parable of the Lost Sheep; the Lost Coin; and the Lost Son. They were all lost, but then found, just like us. We are told that in our baptism, just like the prodigal, we were dead but are now alive. We are invited to join in the marriage feast of celebration of the Lamb in his kingdom which has no end. How blest we are among all others that God has bestowed such grace upon us. God deliver us from the hardness of heart of the elder son and the true repentance of the prodigal as we join together in his feast of celebration and joy! Amen.

**The peace of God guard your hearts and minds as you believe and trust in him.
Amen.**

Pastor Ron Breight Christ Lutheran Church Forest Hills, Pennsylvania

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