

**Sermon    March 30, 2025**

**Luke 15:11-32; Two Lost Sons**

**Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen!**

On this Fourth Sunday in Lent, we encounter one of Jesus' most beloved parables—the parable of the prodigal son. While we often focus on the younger son's recklessness and the father's extravagant mercy, this parable is actually about two sons—both lost in their own ways.

This is a story about repentance, restoration, and rejoicing—central themes in the season of Lent. This simple yet profound story encapsulates the entire Christian faith. One son rebels against his father, wastes his inheritance, and falls into despair. He repents and is restored. The father, filled with mercy, celebrates his return. The other son, however, becomes angry at the father's grace and refuses to rejoice. This parable teaches us that repentance is the path to restoration and that God's mercy is lavish and undeserved, extended to all who come to Him in faith.

### **The Law: Conviction and Repentance**

Jesus told this parable to the scribes and Pharisees, who grumbled at His association with sinners. The religious leaders of Jesus' time had little understanding of grace. They saw themselves as righteous and looked down on those they deemed unworthy. But in this parable, Jesus is not just talking about a wayward son and a gracious father—He is addressing the Pharisees themselves.

The younger son, who demands his inheritance early, is clearly wrong. In Jewish society, asking for an inheritance while the father is still alive is a profound insult—it's as if he were wishing his father dead. Yet the father grants his request. The son departs to a far country, wasting his inheritance in reckless living. We don't know exactly how he spent it, but we do know that it all came to ruin. Penniless, alone, and starving, the son hits rock bottom. He ends up feeding pigs—a job that was the lowest possible status for a Jewish man, as pigs were considered unclean animals and to be avoided.

Here is where the Law comes in: the son realizes the depth of his sin. "I have sinned against heaven and before you," he confesses. He knows he has lost everything—his wealth, his dignity, his place in his father's household. And this is the point where we, too, must examine ourselves. Like the younger son, we have all gone astray. We have broken God's commandments, dishonored our Father, and wasted His gifts. We, too, are lost in our sin and deserving of judgment.

The Law condemns us. It reveals our guilt. Like the younger son, we find ourselves in the muck and mire of our own choices, realizing that we are hopeless apart from God's grace. It is here, in the depths of despair, that we come to our senses and realize we cannot save ourselves. Like the younger son, it's important for us to turn back to God in repentance, confessing our sins and asking for His mercy.

### **The Gospel: Grace and Restoration**

But the beauty of this parable is that it doesn't end with the son in despair. No, the story takes a glorious turn. The father, seeing his son from a distance, runs to meet him. The father's response is filled with grace. He doesn't lecture the son. He doesn't demand repayment for what was lost. Instead, he embraces his son, kisses him, and says, "This son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found." The father's joy is overwhelming, and he orders a feast to celebrate his son's return.

This is where we see the heart of the Gospel. The father in the parable is a picture of our heavenly Father. Like the father in the story, God does not deal with us according to our sins but according to His mercy. Even when we have wasted His gifts and turned away from Him, He is always ready to receive us back with open arms. The son's return is not based on anything he has done; it is based entirely on the father's love and grace.

This is where the parable connects with the heart of the Christian message: Jesus Christ, crucified and risen, is the ultimate expression of God's grace toward us. We are like the younger son—lost and dead in our sins—but through Christ's sacrifice on the cross, God has made a way for us to be restored. Christ's death is the penalty for our rebellion. He bore the punishment we deserved so that we might receive the robe of righteousness, the signet ring of sonship, and the

sandals of a beloved child. Through His resurrection, He gives us new life, just as the father gave his son new life.

In Christ, we are restored—not by our efforts, but by His grace. His grace is extravagant. It is the ultimate act of prodigal love, the kind of love that seeks us out, forgives us completely, and celebrates our return. We are not merely forgiven; we are restored to our place in God's family. The Father rejoices over our repentance because He delights in restoring us to life.

### **The Older Son: The Law and Self-Righteousness**

But there is another son in the story, the older son. He represents those who, like the Pharisees, try to justify themselves by their obedience to the law. The older son is angry that the father would throw such a lavish celebration for the younger son, who had wasted his inheritance in sinful living. The older son has worked hard, obeying every command, but he feels entitled. He believes he deserves better than this.

The father's words to the older son are a reminder to us: "Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours." The father loves the older son, just as he loves the younger. But the older son's attitude of self-righteousness blinds him to the grace of the father. He cannot rejoice in the return of his brother because he sees the father's grace as unfair. He believes that he deserves something more for his work.

This is where the Law comes in again: the older son, like the Pharisees, is consumed by self-righteousness. He sees his relationship with the father as transactional. He believes that his faithful service to his father somehow earns him favor. But the Gospel reminds us that we are saved by grace alone, not by works. Just like the younger son, the older son needs repentance. He, too, needs to recognize that he is not entitled to anything, and that the father's grace is freely given to all.

### **A Modern-Day Prodigal Story**

Consider a man named John Newton. Born in the 18th century, he lived a reckless and sinful life as a slave trader. He rejected God and indulged in every vice. But

one day, in the midst of a storm at sea, he cried out to God for mercy. That moment marked the beginning of his repentance. Over time, Newton left his old ways behind, became a pastor, and wrote the famous hymn Amazing Grace. His story mirrors that of the prodigal son—lost in sin but restored by God’s grace.

### **Conclusion: Repentance, Restoration, and Rejoicing**

And so, as we consider both sons, we see ourselves. Whether we are like the younger son, lost in rebellion, or like the older son, lost in self-righteousness, we all need the same grace. Repentance is the key to both sons’ restoration, and it is the key for us as well.

If today we find ourselves far away from God our Father, because of our own choices or the actions of others, we are invited back into the warm embrace of God’s undying grace. God’s arms are always open to our return. If we have been cold to God’s grace he so openly showers on people we might see as unworthy and deplorable, it’s important for us to come in from the cold and enter the party for the prodigals. It’s fitting and proper for us to rejoice in God’s grace both for ourselves and for others.

The grace of God, revealed in Jesus Christ, fill our hearts with joy, repentance, and thanksgiving. Amen.

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