

## SERMON SUN. MARCH 27, 2022

Lent 4C 2022 Luke 15:1-13, 11-32 “The Prodigal Father”

Dear fellow redeemed of, by and for Christ, today we return to the familiar parable of the Prodigal Son. If you’ve ever lost your child in a store for even a short time, you know the joy and relief that the prodigal son’s father felt.

He had “lost” his son. One day his son came up to him and demanded his share of the inheritance – which is the equivalent of wishing that his father was dead and had the chutzpah to say it to his face!

The son took his inheritance money and left. He didn’t tell his father where he was going, and the father probably wondered if he would ever see his son again. No matter how bad their relationship evidently was, the father was heartbroken.

And so, every day, he would look out his window, past everything else in the village, to see if his son was returning. Until one day, it happened!

There was his long-lost son, coming down the road! At that moment, seeing his son, nothing else mattered to the father!

He runs down the road of the village and greets his long-lost son! He hugs and kisses him, and its likely there were tears of joy streaming down his face.

He doesn’t care about the grave insult he had received; nothing else mattered! Only that he found his son again!

And he doesn’t care what the rest of the village thinks about his love for his “prodigal” son. No doubt the son had been the subject of much gossip and head shaking.

He doesn’t even care that his son left wealthy and came back barefoot and in rags! Only one thing mattered: the joy of finding a child who was lost.

And that, my friends, is a picture of your Savior. God, in Jesus Christ, came to find you – his lost sons and daughters.

God, in Christ, was **reconciling us and not counting our sins against us. God, in Christ Jesus, came to seek and save the lost. For while we were still sinners, Christ came for us.**

While we were still a long way off, God came down from heaven to find us, to rescue us, to give Himself for us.

He allows Himself to be publicly shamed, abused and hung on a cross as a criminal. Such a costly love! But He doesn’t care. He must do this out of love for the lost child!

And God doesn't hide His love, so when He finds us, He celebrates! But not alone – the father in the parable throws a great banquet. Jesus celebrates with those He finds. The angels of God rejoice in heaven over one sinner who repents.

Such is the love of your Heavenly Father for you. And yet, He only accepts us back on His terms. Did you notice that?

In the parable, the prodigal son thinks he has it all figured out. After he wastes all of his inheritance, he thinks he'll fix it by getting a job. When that doesn't work (and he runs out of other options), he decides to go back to his father – but with a plan!

To make up for what he did. To restore the family name and the family honor. And so he decides to go back and ask his father not to take him back as a son but as a servant.

That way, he can save enough money to pay his father back. So he goes back, thinking, I ***will make himself worthy.***

And so often that is what we think. We think that somehow, we will make ourselves worthy of God's forgiveness. I will try harder, repent more earnestly, re-dedicate myself, and I will...

But you can't fix a broken heart like a broken window. A new sheet of glass and the broken window is a thing of the past. Not so a broken heart.

And so, the Father doesn't accept us back on our terms, as if we can fix the sinful mess we've made of our lives!

To believe that only cheapens the reality of the pain we have caused by our sin. No, God only accepts us on His terms.

So what, then, are His terms? Simply this: that we receive His unconditional love and forgiveness, stop trying to make ourselves worthy and accept the Father's love for us.

That's what happened in the parable. The father acts first. The father throws his arms around his son and hugs and kisses him. The father shows his love, joy, and forgiveness – and in response, the son is changed.

The son now realizes that nothing he can do to make himself worthy of being a son, that it's all about God's grace.

He sees that the problem is not the money he wasted, but his father's broken heart. He can only receive his father's love, and rejoice at being found.

The wandering son is humbled in the face of such overwhelming grace. And when the father sees that his love and grace have been received, the celebration begins!

He orders his son restored. He doesn't want anyone to see him in rags but in riches.

Killing a fatted calf would feed over 200 people – such is the father's joy! He wants everyone to celebrate with him. His son was lost, but now he's been found! **PAUSE**

In like manner, Jesus sought out lost children. He eats with tax collectors and sinners. He rejoices in finding them.

He rejoices because that is why He came down from heaven – to find and embrace his lost sons and daughters and overwhelm them with His love.

And when they are brought to repentance, *He celebrates.*

But because of this prodigious love, this self-sacrifice, **this “foolishness of the cross,”** the Pharisees and Scribes are grumbling against Him.

In our parable they represent the older brother – grumbling at the father's lavish love; grumbling at the joyous celebration.

The father doesn't get angry at the older son, but wants him to understand that his love and grace are for him too.

Please notice that the older son **has the same problem** the younger son – thinking of his relationship with his father in terms of service and work and worthiness.

He tells his father, “**Look, these many years I have served you . . .**” But the father won't accept such talk.

His acceptance of both sons is not on the basis of their service or work or worthiness – no, they are his sons!

They will always be his sons! And he wants them only to accept his love!

So too for you and me. You may consider yourself a prodigal son, having sinned greatly and wasted much of what you'd been blessed with. Perhaps you think you can make it up to God by making yourself worthy of God's love again.

Or perhaps you may consider yourself like the older son, you've served the Lord faithfully all your dear born days and consider yourself worthy of God's love.

***But your Heavenly Father will have none of that kind of talk!***

He does not love or forgive or accept you on the basis of anything you have done, or what you promise to do in the future. No, you are saved by grace alone, for Jesus' sake alone.

While today's lesson is called the parable of the prodigal son, I submit it should really be called the parable of the prodigal Father. Prodigal means spending money or resources freely and recklessly; wastefully extravagant.

The Father "spent" his most valuable asset, His Son, in order to overwhelm you with His love, that in repentance you give up everything you think you can do for Him, and simply receive His love, grace and forgiveness. That you accept being found.

And that is the focus of this Lenten season.

That God, in Christ, came for us. He left His throne in Heaven to come for you.

He came and gave up everything for you, even his pride, giving it up and exchanging it for the shame of hanging on the cross. Not because you are worthy, because you are not.

And not so that you would become His slave or His servant, but to find His sons and daughters.

The good news is that He has found you, otherwise you wouldn't be here today.

There is nothing that you can do to make yourself worthy. He asks only that you receive His love and forgiveness in repentance, and that you come and eat at His banquet table.

For you were dead in your trespasses, but are now alive. You were lost, but now you have been found.

And so, we bow our heads in prayer, "***Father of all, we give you thanks and praise, that when we were still far off you came to meet us in your Son and brought us home.***

***Dying and living, He declared your love, gave us grace, and opened the gate of glory to us, Your prodigal children.*** We pray this in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.