

SERMON FOR MARCH 31, 2019
TEXT: LUKE 15; 1-3, 15-32 (esp. v 20)
THEME: THE FATHER'S LOVE

But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him

In the name of Jesus:

Today's lesson is the familiar story of the Prodigal Son. It is the last of three stories that Jesus tells in Luke 15. The fifteenth chapter of Luke is often called the Lost Chapter of the Bible, because Luke 15 contains three stories that deal with things that were lost but now are found. There is the story of the lost sheep, the lost coin, and finally the Prodigal Son, the story of the lost son being found. Usually when we read the story of the Prodigal Son, we focus on the son who was lost but then returns. As important as this fact is, there is a greater truth that is the foundation of this story. The Parable of the Prodigal Son is not really a story about the son; it is a story about two sons and their father, ultimately it is a story about God, a story of the love of God, a story of THE FATHER'S LOVE.

The story has been retold and is familiar to many, but let us take a look at the story through the eyes of Jesus as He tells this story to a Middle Eastern culture, of what it would have been like if this happened in His day, for after all, Jesus tells this story to the Pharisees and the

Jewish people of that day, using examples of everyday life to drive home His point.

The story is about the relationship that a father has with his two sons. Jesus doesn't mention the mom because Jesus is trying to make a point about the nature of God the Father. It begins with the younger son saying to his father to give to him his share of his inheritance. The father is a farmer, and owns on the average of six acres of land. What the son requests is that the father give him his inheritance immediately. This is a strange request, because you don't get an inheritance until after the parents die. What the son is asking for is the money now, cut him out of the will, give him what his is, no matter how this looks and no matter what the consequences are. He can't wait for his father to die. The son by this action is saying to his father: "you are dead to me." Can you imagine the heartache of the father? You would expect the father to refuse, but he doesn't. So the father does what is asked, he sells off the land to get the money that his son desires. This transaction, by its very nature becomes public. The people of the community know what is potentially happening. If the prodigal would lose the inheritance after he left the father and the community would cut him off from everyone. A ceremony would take place that would permanently sever the

relationship between the child, the father, and the community he lived in as well.

The prodigal goes on his way and begins to live on the wild side. He lives extravagantly; he uses his resources in expensive living. It isn't that the son does anything immoral; it is that he lives beyond his means. He spends more than what he has. It is only the older brother who makes the claim that his younger brother spent the money on harlots, but he has no way of knowing this because the older son just arrives on the scene of his brother's return from working in the field. No where does Jesus say that this prodigal blew his money by drinking or carousing, in fact, Jesus doesn't say how he lost his money, just that he lost it.

The prodigal is now in a bind. He has no money, and nowhere to turn. He cut himself off from his family and the community. He tries to find a job to recoup his losses, for if he is to return he must return with the money he left with in the first place. First he seeks a job in a far away country as a pig herder, but no one gave him anything. Feeding pigs is the lowest form of degradation for someone who is Jewish. And to make matters worse, the owner of the pigs fed the prodigal but did not pay him. The prodigal was left to eat the pods that the pigs didn't

eat. He is left in total humiliation: no money, no food, and no friends. He couldn't count on anyone, so, in order to try to get ahead, he tries closer to home. He devises a scheme whereby he attempts to save himself. He figures he can work all this out, and so Luke records: "How many of my father's hired servants have more than enough bread, but I perish here with hunger! **18** I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. **19** I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants." He will get a job working for his father. The son is not interested in mending the already broken relationship; he merely seeks to recoup what he has lost monetarily. The prodigal doesn't know how he will be received in the community, much less from the father that he had rejected and was dead to him.

There is a wonderful surprise in this well-known story. The surprise comes in the response of the father. You would think that it would be natural for the father to respond in anger. That is what usually happens in a broken relationship. The human response to this broken relationship would be for the father to scold the son, to speak of the hurt, the shame, and the embarrassment that this son brought upon

the father, the father's good name, and the family. That is what we would expect, but the story ends with a wonderful surprise.

His father surprises him with a love that is totally undeserved. The father takes the initiative, and seeing his lost son a long way off, the father goes to the son! His father overwhelms his son by a humble yet visible demonstration of his love. This love is pure grace, unadulterated grace. The father not only forgives the son, but also restores him to his place in the family. The son regains what he lost and is given so much more! All is forgiven and all is forgotten. It is as if nothing had happened. There is joy in the father's heart, in the household of this family, the community is restored! 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. **23** And bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate. **24** For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.' And they began to celebrate. The prodigal could never be restored and repair this relationship with his father, so the father does what is necessary to restore his relationship with his son. All is well, until the older son shows up on the scene.

Luke records: ""Now his older son was in the field, and as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing. **26** And he

called one of the servants and asked what these things meant. **27** 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.' **28** But he was angry and refused to go in. His father came out and entreated him, **29** 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. **30** But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him!' Here is the older son, the self-righteous son, who now says to the father, "Look, I have done what you have expected of me, and is this the thanks I get?" The older son is now on the outs with his father. He doesn't address his father lovingly; there is no respect in how he addresses his father. While the prodigal's relationship with the father was damaged due to extravagant living and excess, here this older son's relationship with his father is damaged because of the older son's self righteousness. The father responds by offering to his older son the same love he offered to the one who returned, only the older son now launches into a bitter tirade against his father, making wild accusations which have no basis in fact, that the young son had spent his inheritance on harlots! In a final plea,

the father offers himself to become reconciled to his older son. The father says: "All that I have is yours, let's rejoice, for the lost has been found!"

The story abruptly ends there. The listener to the story has so many unanswered questions. What happens to the prodigal, what kind of life does he go on to live? And the older son, the question here is this: is he reconciled to his father? These are unanswered questions that will be answered in due time. For you see, the point of the parable is this: God's love is limitless. God loves all, so much so that He sent His only begotten Son, Jesus, to be your Savior and the Savior of all. God loves the sinner and earnestly desires that all be saved and come to faith in Jesus.

No matter who you are, no matter what you have done, the point of the parable is this: God loves you with an everlasting love. He says to you through His Son Jesus Christ: "You are always with Me and everything that I have is yours." So how will you respond to the love of God in Jesus? Will you reject His love, much like the malefactor on the cross who mocked Jesus? Or will you by grace of God repent of your sins and trust in Jesus for forgiveness, help, and salvation? God loves the sinner, God loves you, and He continues to seek to work in your life

so that you would be certain of His love. Even though sin has estranged us from our Father in heaven, God in Christ was reconciling the world to Himself. God was angry with us but in love He has put away His anger, He has satisfied His justice by the death of Jesus on the cross. In Jesus, you have a new relationship with your Heavenly Father. In Jesus you have an eternal relationship with the LOVING HEAVENLY FATHER, In Jesus you can now live your life in joy, for just like the Prodigal Son, nothing will ever separate you from the love of your LOVING HEAVENLY FATHER.

Amen