

Immanuel (Augsburg) Lutheran Church

Shobonier, Illinois

Lent 4C

March 30, 2025

Luke 15:1-3, 11-32

The Prodigal

Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him. 2 And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, "This man receives sinners and eats with them." 3 So he told them this parable: . . . 11 And he said, "There was a man who had two sons. . . ." (Luke 15:1-3, 11 ESV)

In the name of Jesus, the only Savior of the world,

Two groups of people come to Jesus. One to hear Him and another to grumble against Him, and both for the same reason. "This man receives sinners and eats with them." And while this is good news for the tax collectors and sinners, such as we are, it is not received as such by the Pharisees and the scribes. And Jesus' parable addresses both groups.

He begins: "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." That is amazing! This son wants his share of the inheritance - now. He can't wait for his father to die, after all, who knows how long that might be? No, he wants it now! It's like he's saying, "I wish you were dead, Dad!" And even more amazing than the son's rude demand, the father gives it to him.

And what does the young man do with his share of the inheritance? "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." He leaves home, disgracing his father in front of the

town. He goes off to a far country. He's far from home, both in terms of distance and his mindset. The young man squanders all his wealth in reckless living. That's why he's called the "prodigal" son. "Prodigal" means "wasteful," "lavish," "extravagant."

"And when he had spent everything, a severe famine arose in that country, and he began to be in need." This young man has been very unwise. Now that he's wasted all his resources, this is when he really needs them. "So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed pigs." From living high on the hog, now he is living down among the hogs! He's reduced to feeding pigs, which would be especially humiliating for a Jew. "And he was longing to be fed with the pods that the pigs ate, and no one gave him anything." This boy is hitting rock bottom. His humiliating degradation is more than he can bear. But what can he do?

"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."'" The young man comes to his senses. He remembers that his father's servants have it better than he does. So, he resolves to go back home and confess to his father that he has sinned against heaven and against him, and that he's no longer worthy to be called his son. That's certainly a good start, and he's absolutely right. But in the next part, he wants to set the terms and conditions, "Treat me as one of your hired servants." Does he really think that's an option that will work? After the way he treated his father?

How about you? Do you see yourself in this son? Have you wished God were dead so you can do whatever you want? Have you foolishly gone astray from Him and His will for you? Have you wasted the gifts that your heavenly Father has given you? Have you reached rock-bottom with nowhere to go? If so, there's good news for you today!

The prodigal son sets his plan in motion. "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." This is truly an amazing father! And here, as Jesus does in many of His parables, He stretches reality a bit to make a point. For what human father would be standing at his door every day, for weeks or months on end, looking for and waiting for his son to return? But that's

what God does. And what self-respecting ancient Middle-Eastern father would run out to greet a son who had humiliated him so? You just don't do that! But this father does. And you can feel the emotion in the father's heart as he embraces his son, falls on his neck, and kisses him! What a picture of God's grace and mercy and compassion toward us prodigal sinners!

The son starts his prepared speech: "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 that's as far as he gets. The father cuts him off!

"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."

You see, the father doesn't want another servant. He wants his son back! There's nothing the son must do or can do. Now that the father has got his son back, it's time to celebrate! This father is prodigal too. He's so extravagant, so lavish, in the welcome-home celebration he calls for. A robe, a ring, and shoes - all signs of the restoration of the young man to full son-ship. And a Grade-A fattened calf for the celebratory meal! Dad pulls out all the stops to welcome his lost son home!

Friends, this is how our heavenly Father is toward you. He's lavish, extravagant – "prodigal," if you will – in how warmly He welcomes you home. In your baptism, God has clothed you with the robe of Christ's perfect righteousness. He forgives your sins and restores you and reassures you that you are His own dear child. He holds a celebratory meal for you here in the Lord's Supper, in which you receive a foretaste of the feast to come in heaven. And in this meal, we feast on, not a fattened calf, but the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. God loved us so much that He sent His only Son—the one faithful Son, Jesus Christ—to live and die for us, to be the sacrifice to atone for all of our wasteful, runaway, rebellious misdeeds. What a loving, lavish, extravagant God we have!

With the celebration underway, what about the father's other son, the older one? "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."

The prodigal son was lost when he ran off far from home. But this other son, the older one—he was lost all the while he stayed at home! He just doesn't get it! He should be rejoicing that his brother is back. He should be joining his father in the big celebration. But he isn't. He's standing outside. He's being resentful toward his brother. And he's being rude toward his father by refusing to come in.

So, what does the father do? He comes looking for him. "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!'"

Mr. Self-Righteous, this older son is. And rude and disrespectful, too. He doesn't even address his father as "Father." He just jumps to an angry "Look!" "Look, I've been slaving away for you all these years." See, he just doesn't get it. He's thinking he's been working as a slave, not a son. "And what have I got out of this deal? Not much. But here this son of yours. . . ." Notice, he doesn't even acknowledge his brother as his brother. He's just "this son of yours."

But the father is kind and patient even to this disrespectful older son: "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.'" What an amazing father! To this rude son who won't even call him "Father," he calls him "son." And to this older brother who dismisses his younger brother as "this son of yours," the father reminds him that he's "this your brother."

Indeed, it's not hard to see that the older brother is acting just like the Pharisees, who are standing right there in front of Jesus. Jesus, and all heaven, welcomes and celebrates repentant sinners coming home, but the Pharisees are grumbling like the older brother. They

should be rejoicing and joining the party, but instead they're standing outside, refusing to come in.

Friends, like the prodigal, extravagant father in the parable, Jesus welcomes lost sinners who've come home. "This man receives sinners and eats with them." It's true! The Pharisees meant it as a harsh criticism. You and I hear it as the greatest of news for we know it to be our life and our greatest joy. This man, Jesus, receives sinners and eats with them! That's you! Welcome home! And now the feast. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Rev. Timothy J. Landskroener