

¹¹ Jesus continued: “There was a man who had two sons.

Most of us know this story even if we know only one or two stories in the Bible.
It is often called the story of the prodigal son.
But did you know that the word prodigal actually means wastefully extravagant?
We certainly see how the son is wastefully extravagant with his inheritance.
We clearly hear and see his waste.

¹² The younger one said to his father, ‘Father, give me my share of the estate.’ So he divided his property between them.

In Jesus' parable, the younger son left home by boldly asking for his inheritance.
In his culture, this was one of the most disrespectful things you could do.
He was basically saying to his dad I wish you were dead.
Many Bible translations use the word estate which in Greek is actual bio.
Some of you might know what that word means in English.
It means Life.
The father is being asked to divide his life between his two sons.
So with his pockets full of money and his father's heart and life broken...

¹³ “the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living.

He had gone to a country outside of Israel which was Gentile...
a what happens there stays there kind of place...
and spends it all wastefully...
And he had no idea of what he was **losing** and leaving behind...

¹⁴ After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. ¹⁵ So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. ¹⁶ He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything.

Now everyone hearing this story would already be shocked
by the first things the son did by wishing his father dead
and wasting his inheritance in all the wrong places
but now they would be beside themselves
because no self-respecting Jew would ever work

for a Gentile, a foreigner, one of the citizens of the country.

And if that wasn't bad enough.

He wouldn't take a job feeding pigs as a Jew. Why?

Because he knew that pigs were unclean as declared in Leviticus 11:7, and Deuteronomy 14:8.

This is just about the lowest of the low for a Jew

unless maybe he was a leper too.

17 "When he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have food to spare, and here I am starving to death!'"

The younger son finally realized he was **lost**.

I remember and Taylor reminds us of the missing kid's

milk carton program that was started in 1984

back when there was no good way to get

word to the public that a child was missing.

There were no internets then or facebook's or ticky toks or even phones.

We all got information from mostly 3 channels of TV

and the radio and something called a newspaper.

It was a barbaric time back in the stone age.

Yes, I come from a time when I can't show you

my senior high school picture on my phone.

Now of course we have Amber alerts on our phone

that get our attention and hopefully help find a child.

Right now praying for the young man

Sebastian in Hendersonville lost and alone.

You might wonder why the father didn't go after the son

but the text doesn't tell us where the younger son went

and probably the father didn't know either.

Also maybe he thought he would return soon

and didn't ever imagine he was gone for good.

The truth is we don't know.

Taylor tells us that Jesus' first audience knew

what would happen next in the parable.

The father would maintain his dignity.

The son was dead to him since the son

had treated the father as dead.

Maybe if he was especially merciful,

he would let the son work as a hired hand.

That is supposed to be how it happens.

But what we do know is that the father never forgot him.
How do we know that?

“But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.”

The key here is something maybe you have missed in this story.
When did the father see his son?
A long way off right?
But what does mean had to be happening
or at least could have been happening?
That the father was looking for the lost to come home.
To the father, the younger son was a missing person
and a missing part of his heart.
And maybe he had felt that misery and emptiness
that we as parents are afraid we would feel or
maybe you have felt as your child was lost for a little while or for longer.
And the other thing is that **he ran** to meet him.
That was completely out of character
and undignified for a man of the father’s standing to do.

We as Christians speak of the lost, the least and the last often.
The father in the story refers to his son as lost but is now found.
This is part of a series of 3 lost things stories.
When Newton wrote Amazing Grace as we learned last year
he used this story for his long-loved lyrics
I once was lost but now am found.
The father was moved with compassion ran to him,
hugged him and kissed him.
The kiss symbolizes the father’s forgiveness.

Taylor tells us that John Wesley believed that
the younger sons' chief problem was an independency on God.
The opposite of a dependency right?
He didn’t need the father or the father’s providence.
This was the beginning of his lostness.
Then how he lived and ate with the ritually unclean pigs
were further separations from God.
Even the son realizes this...when he says...

21 “‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’

But like God, the father waited and looked for his lost son to return.
We don't know how long he was gone.
But it feels like the father would have
waited a lifetime for him to return.
Would you if it was your child who was wayward or lost?
Some of you know that feeling.

And if there is any story that Jesus
tells that is an allegory for God it is this one.
The Prodigal is often called the miniature gospel.
Showing us that no matter how far
we go from God and no matter how long we are gone,
God will still welcome us home.

As one hymn goes ...
Softly and tenderly Jesus is calling,
calling for you and for me;
see, on the portals he's waiting and watching,
watching for you and for me.
Come home, come home;
you who are weary come home;
earnestly, tenderly, Jesus is calling,
calling, O sinner, come home
And finally when we come home we are **found**.

22 “But the father said to his servants, ‘Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. 23 Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate.

Each of these gifts was symbolic of reestablishing and restoring his son.
And together they tell us that he even received
his blessing back and the whole community
would treat him as the son he once was.

24 For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’ So they began to celebrate.

But the younger son journey from lost to being found
didn't just begin when he got up and went to his father.

It actually began earlier when he came to his senses.
Because being found begins first with repentance.
That word that we sometimes struggle with
and don't fully understand perhaps.
Repent. Repent literally just means to turn around.
Go in a different direction.

It took a famine and hitting rocking bottom
for the son to consider going back home.
But when we decided to go back home
he didn't just go home for the food did he?
He went home to confess his sin, repent,
and seek to find acceptance and forgiveness even as a hired hand.

¹⁸ I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. ¹⁹ I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired servants.' ²⁰ So he got up and went to his father.

But you see the son never got to say his whole speech
before the father stops him and showers him with gifts.
Joachim Jeremiahs has commented that repentance means
learning to say Abba again, putting one's whole trust in the heavenly father,
returning to the Father's house and the Father's arms.
God gracefully welcomes the lost back.
And not only that God takes great pleasure and celebrates
that not only are we found but that we are alive.
That we have a life with God that is lived to its fullest and abundantly.
This son of mine was dead and has come back to life!

Taylor tells the story that one of my favorite musicians
James Taylor told about his own story with his father
who rescued him from a serious drug habit
back in the early days of his career.
He said I could have disappeared down the drain at that point.
In desperation, Taylor talked to his father on the phone
who told him stay where he was.
He immediately drove 13 hours to NY from NC to get him.
JT said He knew I was in trouble and he dropped everything.
And he himself came. I'll never forget that.

You may know his song Fire and Rain but you may not know

that he wrote part of it about his addiction and trying to overcome it.
... Won't you look down upon me, Jesus?
You've got to help me make a stand
You've just got to see me through another day
My body's aching and my time is at hand
And I won't make it any other way

I mean if you know someone who is lost
wouldn't you do anything you could for them?
Even if all you can do is wait and watch.
One of the things this text challenges us to do is
develop a heart for the lost as Jesus has.
He is the one who has shown us the God
who immediately runs to the lost sons and daughters,
embraces them and celebrates their return.
Remember when Jesus tells this story
he is talking about himself.
This is the heart of the gospel.

And the other Taylor reminds us that someone else
was wastefully extravagant in this story besides.
Who? The father. How?
He threw a lavish party with a fattened calf,
something usually reserved for a great big feast
like our Thanksgiving or Christmas.
He was extravagant in welcoming his son.
The best robe! A ring! Sandals!
But the greatest extravagance came in the father's grace
as he restored his relationship with his son.

Peter Gomes said of this parable
This is the heart of the gospel and Jesus' message:
no one is too far gone, too low, too abased,
too bad to be removed from the unconditional love of the Father,
not even the baddest of the bad.
And not even me or you.
God has waited for us...is waiting for us...
or will wait for us...with a Gracious Heart. Amen.