

LENT... IN THE DRIVEWAY

Order of Service (bulletin)

<https://www.spiritofhope.ca/news-and-events>

Video (recorded live stream)

<https://www.youtube.com/@spiritofhopeunitedchurch791>

March 30, 2025

Lent 4

Luke 15:11-32

Jesus added, “A man had two sons. The younger of them said to their father, ‘Give me the share of the estate that is coming to me,’ So, the father divided up the property between them. Some days later, the younger son gathered up his belongings and went off to a distant land. Here he squandered all his money on loose living. “After everything was spent, a great famine broke out in the land, and the son was in great need. So he went to a landowner, who sent him to a farm to take care of the pigs. The son was so hungry that he could have eaten the husks that were fodder for the pigs, but no one made a move to give him anything. Coming to his senses at last, he said, “How many hired hands at my fathers’ house have more than enough to eat, while here I am starving! I’ll quit and go back home and say, “I’ve sinned against God and against you; I no longer deserve to be called one of your children. Treat me like one of your hired hands.”” With that, the younger son set off for home. “While still a long way off, the father caught sight of the returning child and was deeply moved. The father ran out to meet him, threw his arms around him and kissed him. The son said to him, ‘I’ve sinned against God and against you; I no longer deserve to be called one of your children.’ But this father said to one of the workers, ‘Quick!’ Bring out the finest robe and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and shoes on his feet. Take the calf we’ve been fattening and butcher it. Let’s eat and celebrate! This son of mine was dead and has come back to life. He was lost and now he’s found!’ And the celebration began. “Meanwhile the elder son had been out in the field. As he neared the house, he heard the sound of music and dancing. He called one of the workers and asked what was happening. The worker answered, ‘Your brother is home, and the fatted calf has been killed because your father has him back safe and sound.’ “The son got angry at this and refused to go into the party, but his father came out and pleaded with him. The older son replied, ‘Look! For years now I’ve done every single thing you asked me to do. I never disobeyed even one of your orders, yet you never gave me so much as a kid goat to celebrate with my friends. But then this son of yours comes home after going through your money with prostitutes, and you kill the fatted calf for him!’ “ ‘But my child!’ the father said. ‘You’re with me always, and everything I have is yours. But we have to celebrate and rejoice! This brother of yours was dead and has come back to life. He was lost and now he’s found.’”

Rev. T. Blaine Gregg



(prayer)

The story goes... a youngest of two sons asks his father for money to be able to move out on their own (obviously, they hadn't managed to save any money while living rent free at home, but I digress)

- *you can take it out of my future inheritance*

//

The kid's mind was made up

- he **knew** that this was the right move

//

There is a saying that goes:

- I wish I was a teenager again, when I knew everything about everything
 - I can report that this apparently applies to some modern twenty-somethings as well, but I digress.

//

//

The young man lived fast and loose and the money soon ran out

- forcing him to take a low-paying, humiliating, culturally-inappropriate job

//

The humiliation is so deep, that the kid figured it would actually be less humiliating to get a job back at his dad's estate

- he knows that, *after the way he left*, it will be too much to ask to be welcomed back into the family
 - *I'm sure he knows that his dutiful older brother would oppose that*
- all the younger son can hope for is to be treated (and live) as a servant

//

//

//

// // //

//

What we heard from Luke today is the third of three similar story-parables that Jesus told

- First, there was a man who went looking for a single lost sheep out of a flock of one hundred
- Then, there was a woman who searches everywhere in her house trying to find one of ten coins that had gone missing

//

Rev. T. Blaine Gregg

In both parables, when the coin/sheep is found

- the person calls friends together to rejoice and celebrate the return

//

These parables are relatively short (five and three verses respectively) and both lead up to the same proclamation statement (the point Jesus was really trying to make):

- *there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over [many more] righteous people who need no repentance;*
- *there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents*

//

//

The third parable (today's reading) is longer (at 19 verses) and increases the impact of what was lost

- first, it was 1% of the flock that was missing
- then, it was 10% of the purse
- now, it is 50% (half) of the heirs

This increased relative share implies a greater relative loss.

//

//

The third parable is also different in the way it is told

- in the first two, Jesus directly invites the listeners to imagine themselves as the person experiencing the loss: *Which one of you, having a hundred sheep and losing one of them...*
 - makes sense, that is the only human in the story
- if that is the pattern
 - we are to be the father in today's parable: *Which one of you, having two sons and losing one of them...*
 - presumably, by extension, that makes
 - the younger son, the lost sheep/coin
 - and the older son, the remainder of the flock/coins

//

In truth, it is hard to hear today's parable and treat the sons as inanimate objects.

//

Fortunately, in parable number three, Jesus doesn't actually suggest which one of the three characters to empathize with

- as a result, I suspect that the original audience would do what all of us probably do
- at different times,
 - we might imagine being each of them
 - we can find ourselves empathizing with...
 - the parent
 - the younger child
 - **or** the older brother

//

I know (for me) I can see part of myself in each one

- a different times, I **have been** each one of them

//

I have been the one who made bad decisions that resulted in humiliation and strained relationships.

Rev. T. Blaine Gregg

//

I have been the one affected by the decisions of others and was not able to set aside the anger that resulted.

//

At my best, I have been the one who offered a full forgiveness that refused to be estranged forever.

//

Interestingly, I have shifted between roles within the same situation.

- I have moved from anger to forgiveness
 - AND... I have moved from having an open door to accepting that it really needs to stay closed for the foreseeable future
- And I have been arrogant and selfish... and humbled and guilted to the point
 - that I did not feel that I was worthy of forgiveness.
 - I have been lost in the loneliness that I created

//

// // //

//

You may have heard today's reading often referred to as *the parable of the prodigal son*

- the adjective *prodigal* usually means a lavish, wasteful (even a reckless) use of resources
- and that certainly applies to the younger son whose advanced-inheritance was there and gone with nothing to show for it

//

But the word *prodigal* also applies to the father

- whose generosity could be viewed as extravagant, perhaps wasteful
 - certainly that was the opinion of the older son

//

And so, I kind of like it when people call this story:

- *the parable of the prodigal father*

//

//

//

Obviously, the patient, prodigal parent is the idealized character of the story:

- the one who was (essentially) wished dead by his son
 - *I can't wait for you to die to get "my money"; I want to have it now while I'm young enough to enjoy it.*
- the one who, in spite of that insult, lavished the youngest with (what would be) his eventual due share and wished him well as he set off
- the one who waited for this jet-setter to come home one day
 - either having found success or ruin
- the one who wouldn't even consider the request to accept the wayward as a servant... or reject him outright,
 - instead, this is the one who lavished even more riches on this long lost son

//

//

There is another level to the depth of this parent's forgiveness

- the father ran out to meet the lost son long before the son acknowledged any regret or humility

Rev. T. Blaine Gregg

- in this parable,
 - there is no requirement for a changed heart
 - there is no expectation for contrition or offer of reparations
 - there is not even a need for there to be a request for forgiveness
 - the son is no more expected to offer any requirement for welcome
 - than a lost sheep or coin would feel to be found
- Before the son was able get a *well-rehearsed* word out, the father was running down the path... already exuding grace

//

//

Minimally, as Jesus shared this parable

- the parent running down the driveway is to be viewed as the embodiment of the grace and forgiveness of God
- but... I am quite certain that the listeners were also expected to be asking themselves:
 - *Am I capable of that kind of god-like love and mercy?*
 - *Or... Is there too much of the older brother in me?*

//

//

I am certain that Jesus would hope that the listeners might also imagine themselves as the returning son and ask

- *Do I have the capacity to humble myself to risk and hope enough that some level of renewal might be possible.*
- *And... How would I react if full unconditional forgiveness was offered*
 - *when I know that I don't deserve it?*

//

And, then Jesus probably expected people to understand and appreciate the feelings of the older brother.

- I certainly do
- For me, I think that the oldest brother might be the easiest to empathize with

//

I am self-aware enough to know that

- my idealized view of myself most certainly has a breaking point
- I don't think I can live up to the parable's parent's prodigality.

//

In the right (or more accurately wrong) situation, from experience, I know that am not capable of prodigal forgiveness

- Hurt and disappointment and (often) many previous efforts or broken promises
 - harden my heart to the point that I tell myself that I just can't care anymore
 - It's just too painful
- For my own health, there is a point when I need to be the older brother

//

//

//

//

So, depending on what is going on within the personal relationships of our lives right now, Jesus'

Rev. T. Blaine Gregg

parable of the prodigal parent with two very different children

- might have us relating any of the three characters

//

//

When we are the younger brother...

- we may come to appreciate that what seems abundant today might not last
 - especially if we aren't looking ahead at least a little bit.
 - The younger brother reminds we of the character "Joe" from the movie [Looper](#)
 - Even though he stashed away half of his earnings: assuming it would taken him through 30 years of retirement
 - Joe's self-indulgent lifestyle meant it barely lasted ten years
- As the younger brother, we might be able to find an excuse to go home again
 - In the parable, the son's motivation to return was still selfish; it was not out of a desire for healing or redemption with the family
- As the younger brother we might learn to appreciate compassion that is offered without requirement
 - We might learn to accept unwarranted grace

//

//

When we are the older brother...

- we might appreciate a willingness to stand up for what is just and fair
- but hopefully, we might also be challenged to see beyond ourselves and our own wants
 - an interesting aspect of the parable is that we aren't told whether the older brother was able to set his anger aside and come into the feast
 - it would be a tragic twist if the father regains one lost son, only to lose the other
 - Jesus leaves that to our imagination
- the older brother gives us permission to acknowledge and express legitimate hurt
 - but hopefully, as the older brother, we take seriously the open invitation join in the feast
 - even if we have to listen to the music and dancing from the outside for a while

//

//

It is no secret that it is easier to be either one of the sons than the father.

- But I wonder who Jesus probably is hoping that we might be?

//

//

//

As far as being that lavishly loving parent...

//

//

Actually, I am not sure that it is possible for us to be the prodigal father... at least not all of the time (given the legitimate and reality of the human condition).

- The embodiment of this preconceived grace might be limited to the one who spoke creation into being and declared it to be good... very good
 - It is God who looks beyond our worst decisions and still runs out to meet us
 - EVERYTIME!

Rev. T. Blaine Gregg

//

//

//

It might be enough for us to be that father's oldest son

- to hear the call to join in the celebration
- to consider allowing ourselves to move through our past (even legitimate) disappointment and set our restricted heart free

//

The path to forgiving others goes through an ability to forgive ourselves

- The path to forgiving others goes through an ability to forgive ourselves.

//

Coincidentally, that was the same path that the younger son needed to travel

- The path may have started out as a self-serving desire to not have to slop pigs for a stranger, when there were perfectly good livestock at home needing to be fed
 - but the path transformed into the call to forgive one's self enough to accept unwarranted forgiveness

//

//

That is amazing good news.

//

Amazing Grace Video:

- https://youtu.be/OJi-uKOILV4?si=IMi6lto0_kGN-3i3

//

//

//

#691VU Walls That Divide