

## Sunday Lesson – March 27, 2022

### GOSPEL: Luke 15: 1-3; 11-32

*"God's Prodigal Love"*

#### Context



"Jesus tells three parables. Each involves recovery or reclamation followed by celebration. The first two declare that finding a lost thing legitimately results in rejoicing. They also equate finding and recovery with *repentance*, an idea that was central in last Sunday's Gospel reading.

By contrast, Jesus' third parable does not include the word *repentance* or any of its cognates. It offers a different answer to the scribes and Pharisees, for the three parables do not simply repeat the same point. The three parables' characters evidence a variety, for the third moves away from society's more invisible members (shepherds and women) and takes us inside a privileged family. Furthermore, this is a much thicker parable, not merely due to its length, but because of its narrative complexity and ambiguities." (Excerpts from [workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/fourth-sunday-in-lent-3/commentary-on-luke-151-3-11b-32-2](http://workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/fourth-sunday-in-lent-3/commentary-on-luke-151-3-11b-32-2) by Matt Skinner)

#### Insight

"The parable leaves two themes in tension. On the one hand, Jesus illustrates the love of God that is beyond human love as commonly understood and practiced, for no typical father would act as this father does in the parable. On the other hand, Jesus addresses the parable against his critics, vindicating his message and ministry, by which he consorted with the outcast. His critics are illustrated by the behavior of the elder brother, who cannot join in the rejoicing over the lost being found.

The two themes stand on their own, independent of one other. But they have in common something at a deeper level. Jesus came preaching the kingdom of God. His message was about a

God whose love surpasses all typical expressions known to humanity. That love is celebrated by those who apprehend it in the gospel of Jesus, as illustrated in the scene of celebration after the homecoming of the younger son. But the expression of divine love also evokes resentment in those who assume that they know all about it and claim to know who is worthy of it, and who is not, as illustrated in the scene of the elder son's refusal to join the celebration.

As the father welcomed the son, so God in Christ welcomes us. That has implications for the life of a congregation. As Paul put it so well, "Welcome one another... just as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God" (Romans 15:7)." (Excerpts from [workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/fourth-sunday-in-lent-3/commentary-on-luke-151-3-11b-32-3](http://workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/fourth-sunday-in-lent-3/commentary-on-luke-151-3-11b-32-3) by Arland J. Hultgren)

#### Gospel Reading

**1-3** "By this time a lot of men and women of questionable reputation were hanging around Jesus, listening intently. The Pharisees and religion scholars were not pleased, not at all pleased. They growled, "He takes in sinners and eats meals with them, treating them like old friends." Their grumbling triggered this story. **11-32** Then he said, "There was once a man who had two sons. The younger said to his father, 'Father, I want right now what's coming to me.' "So the father divided the property between them. It wasn't long before the younger son packed his bags and left for a distant country. There, undisciplined and dissipated, he wasted everything he had. After he had gone through all his money, there was a bad famine all through that country and he began to feel it. He signed on with a citizen there who assigned him to his fields to slop the pigs. He was so hungry he would have eaten the corn-cobs in the pig slop, but no one would give him any. "That brought him to his senses. He said, 'All those farmhands working for my father sit down to three meals a day, and here I am starving to death. I'm going back to my father. I'll say to him, Father, I've sinned

against God, I've sinned before you; I don't deserve to be called your son. Take me on as a hired hand.' He got right up and went home to his father. "When he was still a long way off, his father saw him. His heart pounding, he ran out, embraced him, and kissed him. The son started his speech: 'Father, I've sinned against God, I've sinned before you; I don't deserve to be called your son ever again.' "But the father wasn't listening. He was calling to the servants, 'Quick. Bring a clean set of clothes and dress him. Put the family ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Then get a prize-winning heifer and roast it. We're going to feast! We're going to have a wonderful time! My son is here—given up for dead and now alive! Given up for lost and now found!' And they began to have a wonderful time. "All this time his older son was out in the field. When the day's work was done he came in. As he approached the house, he heard the music and dancing. Calling over one of the houseboys, he asked what was going on. He told him, 'Your brother came home. Your father has ordered a feast—barbecued beef!—because he has him home safe and sound.' "The older brother stomped off in an angry sulk and refused to join in. His father came out and tried to talk to him, but he wouldn't listen. The son said, 'Look how many years I've stayed here serving you, never giving you one moment of grief, but have you ever thrown a party for me and my friends? Then this son of yours who has thrown away your money on whores shows up and you go all out with a feast!' "His father said, 'Son, you don't understand. You're with me all the time, and everything that is mine is yours—but this is a wonderful time, and we had to celebrate. This brother of yours was dead, and he's alive! He was lost, and he's found!'" The Message

### What It Could Mean?

"Why did Jesus tell this parable? Jesus uses the three parables to respond to his critics who focused on the sins of the tax collectors and sinners. Jesus demonstrates that God cares

about the sinners and rejoices when they repent. Jesus eating and partying with the sinners symbolizes the feast and joy in heaven over one sinner who repents. These sinners welcomed and responded to the gospel. Jesus' critics act like the elder son who refuses to rejoice with God over the repentant sinners. God begs them to join the celebration like the prodigal father in the parable. Jesus tells us through these three parables that God's prodigal grace and love reaches out to the sinners and outcasts, and God also does not leave out the Pharisees and the scribes. This parable should not be called the prodigal son but "God's prodigal love."

Jesus deliberately has an open ended story. He wants his hearers to fit themselves into the story and act out the ending. The church needs to act out the ending of the story, as well. Is the church willing to welcome the sinners who respond to Christ's message? Or does the church refuse to join the party and celebrate with the repentant sinners?" (Excerpts from [workingpreacher.org](http://workingpreacher.org), Revised Common Lectionary, by Niveen Sarras)

### Readings for Further Study

- [Ephesians 2:12 & 2 Timothy 2: 25-26](#) *Apart from God there is no hope*
- [1 John 1:9 & 2 Peter 3:9](#) *The Lord...is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance*

### Thought for the Day

"The difference between mercy and grace? Mercy gave the prodigal son a second chance. Grace gave him a feast." ~ Max Lucado

### A Prayer

God of the lost, the least, and all who long for home, when we wander from your ways and waste the gifts you have given us, welcome us back, we pray, so that we may celebrate and rejoice in your presence forever; through Jesus Christ your beloved Son. Amen.