

Luke 15:1-3 11-32

Luke 15:3, 11-12

³He told them this parable:

¹¹Jesus said, “A certain man had two sons. ¹²The younger of them said to his father, ‘Father, give me my share of the estate.’ So he divided his property between them.”

Waiting

I.

Being a father is not always an easy task.

He had an estate—a prosperous one, with vast holdings. Sure, there was always lots of work that needed to be done every day, but there were lots of employees to make sure it all got done. The estate functioned like a smooth, well-oiled machine.

Naturally, the father sat at the top of the business plan, functioning as the CEO. Serving directly under him in the management team were his two sons. It’s probably not unusual in that sort of management structure that one brother or the other would *feel* like he was always getting the short end of the stick.

Every day the management team would meet to discuss the work for the day. For one of the brothers, the climate had begun to feel stifling, whether it was true or not.

One particular day the meeting took a turn. The younger son wanted out. “Get the will out of the safe, dad. I want you to divide things up *now*, rather than me having to wait until you die.”

Devastated. That’s how father must have felt. His plan had always been to pass down to his heirs something wonderful.

Reluctantly, he spun the dial on the safe and took out his will. The typical method to divide an estate was to take the number of heirs and add one more part. With two sons, there were three parts; the oldest would receive a double-share.

There was a lot of wealth to the estate, so the younger son had a rather large share for himself. “Not many days later, the younger son gathered together all that he had and traveled to a distant country” (Luke 15:13, EHV). He was satisfied with the reading of the will and his share, but he wanted no part of being around the chafing and watchful eyes of his father any more. Off he went. No forwarding address. No discussing of his plans for the future. He just got out of town as quickly as possible.

Father had not been born yesterday. His younger son’s wealth was no longer tied up in assets at the estate, but in cash. He knew that youth and inexperience usually do nothing but look at today’s balance. Two or three, or twenty or thirty, plans come out of the young mind as ways to use the new-found wealth.

Father is concerned.

Big brother watched the whole thing unfold. He was there, obviously, at the reading of the will. The will had been rewritten before it was put back in the safe. Everything that remained was now in *his* name—nothing that remained was for his little brother.

It was all just as well. That lazy bum hadn’t been pulling his weight in years. Now big brother could double down with his work. All the blood, sweat, and tears that he poured into his work would now be for his own benefit—no need to share.

Father is concerned.

II.

The younger son is elated. They say that money can’t buy happiness, but look at all the friends he suddenly had there in the distant country! There was no shortage of friends ready and willing to join in as he lived it up. “There he wasted his wealth with reckless living” (Luke 15:13, EHV).

Father would not have been surprised.

“After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that country, and he began to be in need” (Luke 15:14, EHV). Where were the young man’s companions now? When the money dried up, so did their friendship. None of them seemed to be willing to reciprocate—to help out the one whose money had been so lavishly spent on them in days gone by.

“He went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed pigs” (Luke 15:15, EHV). What’s a nice Jewish boy doing feeding pigs? He’s not so nice anymore. He’s not so Jewish anymore, either. He had been quite willing to assimilated into the culture of that distant country. Initially he had lived recklessly, spending his wealth with no regard to how quickly the numbers on his bank account were dropping. Now he found himself having to do one of that country’s less enjoyable tasks—all just to get by.

“He would have liked to fill his stomach with the carob pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything” (Luke 15:16, EHV). Even in the most dire of circumstances none of his former friends came to lend him a hand or to give him even a pittance to get by.

Father was concerned.

Every day father stood out at the path, watching, waiting. Hoping for his son to return.

Meanwhile, back at the estate, the older son was hard at work. The morning meetings now just involved himself and his father. After each day’s meeting he would do everything his father had decided was necessary. Instructions would be issued to the various employees.

This son seemed to be familiar with the idea that the foreman who gets his hands dirty and works right alongside the employees will be well-respected. Day after day he was out in the fields, or with the animals, assisting the employees in making sure everything that needed to be done *did* get done.

He worked hard. After all, everything he saw out there could rightly be called his own. In fact, he began to consider it all his just reward.

Father was concerned.

III.

In a distant country, the younger son gave his situation some serious thought. “When he came to his senses, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired servants have more than enough bread, and I am dying from hunger!’” (Luke 15:17, EHV).

The younger son had participated in the reading of the will, and had carefully counted it out as he received his share. He saw his father rewrite the will and put it back in the safe, spinning the dials as it locked with total finality. Absolutely nothing on that estate was his any longer. There were no illusions of grandeur; he knew his older brother would inherit it all. “But,” he reasoned, “I don’t *need* a share. Just to be one of the employees would give me a far better life than anything that’s happening now.”

He started rehearsing what he would say and how he would act. “I will get up, go to my father, and tell him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight. ¹⁹I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired servants’” (Luke 15:18-19, EHV). It was essential that he approach his father with as many mea culpas, I’m sorry’s, as possible. At first he hadn’t wanted to admit it, but there was no question—he had messed up, big time. Still, he knew that his father was a gracious and forgiving man. He was confident that his apologies would be accepted.

Day after day, rain or shine, no matter what pressing business there had been at the estate, father could be found standing out on the path, waiting, hoping, praying.

IV.

“He got up and went to his father. While he was still far away, his father saw him and was filled with compassion. He ran, hugged his son, and kissed him” (Luke 15:20, EHV).

Staring down the path, father became excited! He knew that gait. There was no question that the figure in the distance was his younger son. The day he had so been waiting for had arrived!

This was no time to think about dignity. It might have been years since he had moved at this speed, but he couldn't wait; he hoisted up his robe and started running. What a reunion took place, there in the dusty path.

The younger son launched into his carefully rehearsed speech: "Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight. I am no longer worthy to be called your son" (Luke 15:21, EHV).

There was much more to his speech than that. All he wanted was to be taken back as a hired hand. He wanted just to live in the bunkhouse with all the other employees. He didn't care if he had to do the most menial of tasks, because he knew how well his father took care of his employees.

He never got that far; his father cut him off, stopping him in mid sentence.

"But the father said to his servants, 'Quick, bring out the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. ²³Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let us eat and celebrate, ²⁴because this son of mine was dead and is alive again. He was lost and is found'" (Luke 15:22-24, EHV).

As far as the father was concerned, forgiveness had long ago been predetermined. There was no cot in the bunkhouse. No regular workman's clothing was issued. Servants were directed to bring out the best, just as his son had worn before.

"Then they began to celebrate" (Luke 15:24, EHV). Father was ecstatic.

V.

"His older son was in the field. As he approached the house, he heard music and dancing. ²⁶He called one of the servants and asked what was going on. ²⁷The servant told him, 'Your brother is here! Your father killed the fattened calf, because he has received him back safe and sound.' ²⁸The older brother was angry and refused to go in" (Luke 15:25-28, EHV).

Every day, without fail, the older son had attended the business meetings with his father. Every day, without fail, he had done the work. *He* deserved the attention. Without him there wouldn't be an estate for his ingrate brother to come home to. It was infuriating. There was no way he would be part of this charade.

Father was concerned.

"His father came out and began to plead with him. ²⁹"He answered his father, 'Look, these many years I've been serving you, and I never disobeyed your command, but you never gave me even a young goat so that I could celebrate with my friends. ³⁰But when this son of yours arrived after wasting your property with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him!'" (Luke 15:28-30, EHV).

What a self-righteous jerk! It was clear that his brother was a repentant sinner. He couldn't even welcome him back on the estate?

Father was concerned.

"The father said to him, 'Son, you are always with me, and all that I have is yours. ³²But it was fitting to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again. He was lost and is found'" (Luke 15:31-32, EHV).

Everything here is already yours. Why not be happy? Your brother has seen the light and has come home. Welcome him. He was lost, but now he is found.

VI.

The parable used to always have the title "The Prodigal Son." Many translations today, including the Evangelical Heritage Version we have read from title it "The Lost Son."

Which one was lost?

As Jesus intended in his parable, two different kinds of people are pictured. Let's call them both Children of God as the parable began. They both found themselves to be occupants of the Father's estate—the church.

One child of God got tired of what seemed to be onerous restrictions. The daily meeting at the table was boring. There was so much more to life than to do all the petty and pesky little things around the estate. The wide world with all its joys was just out there waiting. The no-longer Child

of God enjoyed everything *but* the onerous restrictions of the past. Nothing was outside the realm of possibilities.

The other Child of God stayed at the estate. Day after day, year after year, there was that Child of God, working alongside everyone else on the estate, just trying to maintain the property and get things done. Eventually some bitterness developed. There was a demand for a reward. *Something* “ought to be” handed to this Child of God. It was *deserved* for all the effort that had been put in, right?

Father was concerned.

VII.

“All the tax collectors and sinners were coming to Jesus to hear him. ²But the Pharisees and the experts in the law were complaining, “This man welcomes sinners and eats with them” (Luke 15:1-2, EHV).

Jesus’ whole reason for telling this parable, along with the Lost Sheep and the Lost Coin that we skipped right over, was to respond to the complaint lodged about Jesus welcoming sinners.

Those demanding answers of Jesus’ custom of associating with sinners thought the younger son was getting what he deserved when he suffered in the distant country. They were certain that the older son should be rewarded.

It turns out that those demanding answers from Jesus were the self-righteous older brother. Their self-righteousness sometimes resembles those of us in the church, doesn’t it? We’re here. We listen to God’s Word; many, if not most, of those who come on a regular basis willingly participate in the work of the church with offerings and volunteering. It almost feels like God ought to give us a pat on the back for all our efforts. Surely our fellow Christians ought to congratulate us for all we have done.

Sometimes we resent those who left, like the younger son. They went off to live whatever way they wanted. Then, after completely blowing it, they come back.

Father is concerned. Not just the father in Jesus’ parable, but our Heavenly Father. He’s waiting on the path for both kinds of his Children.

Earlier in the service we had the confession of sins and the absolution. Were you concerned as you confessed your sins to the Lord? Did you wonder whether he could or would forgive you? You didn’t wonder at all, did you? You knew.

Just like the younger son in Jesus’ parable. You knew that the Heavenly Father is always there, always watching, always waiting. You knew that Jesus came to make a payment for all those sins—all the times you went off track and did things your own way, as well as all the times you were self-righteous and thought you deserved something from God.

You knew. You knew that forgiveness is there only because of the Heavenly Father’s compassion—a compassion that was displayed by the sacrifice of his One and Only Son for you.

He was waiting. And you had not one ounce of fear as you approached him, all prepared to make your speech begging his forgiveness. He was ready to embrace you and welcome you with open arms. You knew he was waiting. Amen.