

Prodigal Grace

King of Glory Lutheran
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March 29-30, 2025
Lent 4: Luke 15:1-3, 11b-32

¹ Now all the tax collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to [Jesus.] ² And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, “This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them.”

³ So he told them this parable: ^{11b} “There was a man who had two sons. ¹² The younger of them said to his father, ‘Father, give me the share of the property that will belong to me.’ So he divided his property between them. ¹³ A few days later the younger son gathered all he had and traveled to a distant country, and there he squandered his property in dissolute living. ¹⁴ When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that country, and he began to be in need. ¹⁵ So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs. ¹⁶ He would gladly have filled himself with the pods that the pigs were eating; and no one gave him anything. ¹⁷ But when he came to himself he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired hands have bread enough and to spare, but here I am dying of hunger! ¹⁸ I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; ¹⁹ I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands.”’ ²⁰ So he set off and went to his father. But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him. ²¹ Then the son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’ ²² But the father said to his slaves, ‘Quickly, bring out a robe—the best one—and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. ²³ And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; ²⁴ for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!’ And they began to celebrate.

²⁵ “Now his elder son was in the field; and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. ²⁶ He called one of the slaves and asked what was going on. ²⁷ He replied, ‘Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has got him back safe and sound.’ ²⁸ Then he became angry and refused to go in. His father came out and began to plead with him. ²⁹ But he answered his father, ‘Listen! For all these years I have been working like a slave for you, and I have never disobeyed your command; yet you have never given me even a young goat so that I might celebrate with my friends. ³⁰ But when this son of yours came back, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fatted calf for him!’ ³¹ Then the father said to him, ‘Son, you are always with me,

and all that is mine is yours.³² But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found.’ ”

How many of us this morning ache to come home to God? If you are a parent you know that feeling of waiting for your child to come home after curfew. Your brain goes to all the worst possibilities. Your own heart it out there on the streets wandering around looking for your child. You know this feeling.

God is like that. God is aching for us to simply come home. Come and return. Come and rest. Come and just ‘be’ in God’s embrace. See this amazing drawing? It represents the reading that Ginny read for us. We are a new creation in Christ. Our old self has moved out of the house. Our new self...the one that knows the peace of God has moved in. Only by God’s grace...only by God’s mercy. The door is open. The light in the window is on. Come on in...there is love here.

(Slide) Grace. Amazing Grace. “I once was lost but now I’m found.” That’s what the father in this Prodigal story said. “My son! I thought he was dead. But he’s alive. He was lost to me. Now he’s found!” The whole point of the story! God is that father. That parent who longs to hold the adult child once more.

Grace feels amazing doesn’t it? We rehearse what we’ll say. Our hearts pound just a bit because the relationship is so important. We apologize. Then comes those words we long to hear. “It’s alright. I forgive you. We can move on.” Grace is amazing when we receive it.

The younger son...this is what he felt. He had resigned himself to being a hired man. A worker for his dad. But that’s not what he got! The repentant heart...he felt his Dad’s arms around him. The ring and the robe...those signified his place back in the family! He was a son again!

(Slide - yucky) But...think for a moment of a person you don’t like very much. Grace can feel pretty yucky when we think that God might have mercy and love for THAT person. Fascinating isn’t it? But we become the judge, the prosecution and the jury when we go there. And we cannot know God’s mind...

The older son...this is what he felt. He had stayed home. Every day, up at dawn doing chores. This is what responsibility looks like. This is righteousness. Silently fuming at his younger brother...off to who knows where. ‘I’m the one who sees Dad’s heart ache. I’m doing all I can to keep this land in the family. I’ve

always...always been the responsible one. You were always bringing shame upon our family.” The older brother fumes inside his head.

(Slide – peanut butter sandwich) Grace is messy, isn't it? Like a PB&J that squishes all the insides out when you press it together. Grace gets messy at times. It slides where it will and we can't control it.

(Slide – gentle rain on flower) And yet...like this gorgeous rain we've had...grace is beautiful. It comes without our asking. We cannot control it. Grace is illogical. Unconditional. Grace rains where it will...

(slide- honor shame) the fascinating thing about this story is that there is so much shame. Before we ever even get to the grace there is shame. In Jesus day people lived in an honor and shame culture which meant that anyones behavior in a family could bring shame or honor to that individual or the whole family. The boy asking for his inheritance, is like saying to his dad I wish you were dead! He brings shame upon himself. The dad gives it to him! The dad brings shame upon the family! The boy squanders it... the inheritance. It's all gone. More shame. The dad pulls up his robe, runs and shows his legs to greet his son. Disgraceful! The older son who should have been responsible for repairing family relationships, pulls his dad outside the party and makes a scene! More shame!

What shame or guilt are you and I hauling around behind us. In secret. That only God knows. Is it time to come home?

(slide of house and heart) do you hear yourself in this story? Can we see ourselves in all three characters? Running away from God's grace just because we want to. Striving so hard to live a right life and be righteous. Offering forgiveness out of grace and love.

Is there anyone that you or I need to offer forgiveness to today? Or do we need to forgive ourselves? Or do we need to receive forgiveness from someone who is offered it to us?

Reverend Sarah Speed writes this prayer. “Holy God, help me remember that when it comes to the story of the prodigal son, I play all three roles. I can make the same mistakes, but I can also make the same gracious choices. Therefore, help me be like the prodigal son who was quick to apologize. Help me be like the older brother who aimed for righteousness, and help me be like the father who celebrated love at every turn. I can be all three. Amen.”