

“Steadfast Love”

Luke 15:11-32 (NIV)

The Parable of the Lost Son

¹¹ Jesus continued: “There was a man who had two sons. ¹² The younger one said to his father, ‘Father, give me my share of the estate.’ So he divided his property between them.

¹³ “Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living. 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.

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! 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 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.

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

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

²⁵ “Meanwhile, the older son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. ²⁶ So he called one of the servants and asked him what was

going on. ²⁷ ‘Your brother has come,’ he replied, ‘and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.’

²⁸ “The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him. ²⁹ But he answered his father, ‘Look! All these years I’ve been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. ³⁰ But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!’

³¹ “‘My son,’ the father said, ‘you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. ³² But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’”

This parable is well known as the prodigal son (the lost son) and is preceded by the parable of the lost sheep and the parable of the lost coin. Before we delve into this story let’s look at the meaning of prodigal. When used as an adjective it means: 1. Wastefully or recklessly extravagant; 2. Lavishly extravagant. And when used as a noun it means: one who is wastefully extravagant. Keep this definition of prodigal in mind as we enter the Gospel lesson.

In this story we are introduced to a father and his two sons. It begins with the younger son having the audacity to go to his father and request his share of the estate. I see this son as being selfish and furthermore disrespectful to his father. But his father divided his property between his two sons.

The younger son receives this undeserved gift of inheritance and brings disgrace to his father for making such a request, possibly wishing that his father was dead. Not long after this transaction, the son gathers all his belongings and sets off to a distant country where he squandered his wealth in wild living. He spent everything and on top of that there was a severe famine in that whole country and he began to be in need. What to do?

He went to one of the citizens of the country and hired himself out. He was sent to the fields to feed pigs and longed to feed on the pods that they were eating. No one

gave him anything. He had hit the bottom. He had come to the end of himself. Maybe this was his “selah” moment. But what he breathed in was the stench of the pigs. This brought him to his senses and he said to himself, “How many of my father’s hired servants have food to spare, and here I am starving to death!”

He woke up to the realization that he should get up and go back to his father. As he was walking, he rehearsed what he would say to his father. “Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired servants.”

As he approached his father’s house, his father saw him off in the distance and was filled with compassion for him. He ran to his son and threw his arms around him and kissed him. And as his son was making his plea for forgiveness the father was telling his servants to quickly bring the best robe and put it on my son. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let’s have a party! Let’s celebrate! My son was dead and is alive again! He was lost and now is found! There was music and dancing!

Now the older son enters the story. He had been out in the field and as he came near to the house he heard all the commotion and asked one of the servants what was going on. The servant replied, “Your brother has come and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.”

At this the older brother became very angry and refused to go in and participate in this celebration. So his father came out and pleaded with him. But the older son unleashed his anger and answered his father, “Look! All these years I’ve been slaving for you and you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!”

In the older son’s mind he is asking, “Where is the justice?” And when he was stating his case to his father, did you notice that he didn’t acknowledge that his brother was his brother.

The father trying to draw his son in says, “My son, you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of your was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.”

Can you see that both sons were lost? One outside of the house and the other inside the house. Can you see that the father was emulating the unconditional love of our Heavenly Father? Ponder on where you see the prodigal, as an adjective and as a noun.

I always have related to the older son and probably because I am the oldest sibling in my family. But as I was preparing this message and because of the stage of life that I'm in, I find wisdom and strength in the father. I want to emulate that unconditional love.

We don't know how things worked out for this father and his sons from this point forward, but this story, in some form or other, has been played out since the beginning of time. Remember Cain and Abel, Jacob and Esau, Joseph and his brothers. And it is still being played out today. Look at the royal family – William and Harry. And, believe it or not, it can come to our own doorsteps.

In closing let us find assurance in the words from Paul's second epistle to the Corinthians. “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come. The old has gone, the new is here! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”

Praise be to God! We have work to do fellow ambassadors! Amen!