

032722 “Parable of the Two Sons” Luke 15:11-32

Everyone has lost something at one time or another. There is even a website now at www.lostandfound.com that acts as a global lost and found box. Users can report items missing and users can report items found. According to their statistics, about twice as many objects have been reported lost as have been reported found in the U.S.

So when was the last time you overturned the house to find a missing pair of glasses, wallet, keys, or phone? When was the last time you cleaned out your car, hunted through the garage to find what you were missing? We all know the feeling of trying to find something that is significant to you. You're really not at ease until it is found.

The passage we read today is the well-known story of the prodigal son, lost and found. According to the law in Deuteronomy, the tradition at the time was that two-thirds of the property is to be inherited by the eldest son and the remaining one-third is to be inherited by the younger son, but this is only after the father passes away. Per this principle, the father could have easily ignored the younger son's request. But the father granted the younger son's request, and the younger son goes out and squanders it all. While struggling to stay alive, the son remembers that even the servants of his father had plenty of food; he thus decides to return not as a son but as a servant, so that he wouldn't starve at least.

Notice that the father runs towards the son as soon as his face loomed on the horizon. The father didn't just run into him out of coincidence; this shows that the father had always been waiting for his son to return. Instead of scolding him as the son expected, the father rejoiced, putting a ring on his son's finger and throwing a big party for him.

Are we not, in a sense, like the younger son in this story? Sometimes we believe in our own plans, and think the Bible is too old-fashioned. Sometimes we all know what the scripture says, but we choose to ignore it to live according to our own desires. God sent His one and only son to die for us in order to save us from sin and death, and make us God's everlasting children, but we often live like this temporary world is everything. We must all hear the call of Christ to return to God in this season of Lent.

Turn now to the reaction of the elder son who returned from working in the fields. Compared to the younger son who returned from wandering, how cool is the elder son who returned from work? When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. So he called one of the servants. He asked him what was going on. 'Your brother has come home,' the servant replied. 'Your father has killed the fattest calf. He has done this because your brother is back safe and sound.'

The elder son became angry that the father would throw such a big party for

the younger son who wasted all the wealth on prostitutes, but never celebrated his own hard work. The elder son thinks he has always been obedient and faithful to this father. But he was missing out on the most important thing: his father's heart. His father had walked to the outskirts of the village every day, yearning for his younger son's return.

If the elder son knew of this heart, he would have helped look for his brother. Or at the very least, knowing how much his father had been waiting for and wanting the brother's return, the elder son would have welcomed and embraced his return.

Perhaps over the course of the journey with Christ, people's hearts have changed from that of the prodigal son to that of the elder son. We must always check our faith so that we do not live in such a way. We could think we're doing pretty well compared to the younger sons of this world – we read the Bible, come to church on Sundays, donate on a regular basis... but are we really paying attention to our God's heart in our daily lives? The God who treasures one soul more than the world?

The reason why Jesus tells this story is provided in verses 1 and 2. He intends it for the Pharisees who think they are the chosen ones but ignore, condemn, and discriminate others. But notice this passage applies to us as well. We must reflect on whether we are extending our loving hands to the lost souls around us, or if we're preoccupied with our own business like the elder son was.

That the elder son had never even got to share a goat with his friends is not because of the father; it is because their relationship was not intimate. Similarly, Jesus points out that even though the scribes and the Pharisees were spot on with keeping the traditions of the elders, they neglected the most fundamental element of the law – God’s love. Jesus criticizes that these scholars and religious leaders lacked a loving heart for God and people around them.

We may grow accustomed to a church-going life over time. But we should never lose sight of our personal relationship with God. How do we grow more intimate with God? The answer is in our passage today: we must share our God’s joy. We must feel joy for which our God rejoices. We must constantly ask, how do I please God with my life? We must train ourselves to hear God, to know God’s words – and trust and obey. This might mean encouraging a fellow believer who is straying away from God. This might mean praying for that person, with love and not judgment. This might mean blessing those who are walking with the Lord. This might mean serving others who need your help.

God rejoices in the return of a sinner just as the father in this story accepts his son’s return. This is not because of anything the son has done; it is because he is the father. The reason why we’re deemed precious by God has nothing to do with us, and everything to do with the fact that God loved us first. For God, a person’s life is more valuable than the whole world. “For God so loved the

world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” (John 3:16).

Dr. John Knox sees another “prodigal” character in this story – the father. He reasons that ‘wasteful’ is a concept that should be expanded more broadly; Look at how much the father wastes on his younger son – 1/3 of his wealth, the ring, the clothes, the party... Our God loves us so much that it almost looks like wasting. This is the grace of God.

John Wesley was robbed as he was returning from a service one night.

As the bandit was leaving, Wesley called out, “Stop! I have something more to give you.” The surprised robber paused. “My friend,” said Wesley, “you may live to regret this sort of life. If you ever do, here’s something to remember: the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from all sin!” The thief hurried away, and Wesley prayed that his words would bear fruit.

Years later, Wesley was greeting people after a Sunday service when he was approached by a stranger. It surprised Wesley to learn that this visitor, now a Christian and a successful businessman, was the one who had robbed him years before! “I owe it all to you,” said the transformed man.

“Oh no, my friend,” Wesley exclaimed, “not to me, but to the precious blood of Christ that cleanses us from all sin!”

Dear beloved sisters and brothers in Christ Jesus, I pray that we will lead our everyday lives knowing and basking in this love. Softly and tenderly Jesus is

calling, calling for you and for me. See, on the portals he's waiting and watching, watching for you and for me. Oh Fairfield Grace, come home! May God's grace, peace, goodness, and mercy be with you and your family, and your business, and your studies, and with the lives of your children. Amen.