

## **Sermon March 30, 2025**

### **Luke 15:1-3, 11b-32 (Good News Bible)**

One day when many tax collectors and other outcasts came to listen to Jesus, the Pharisees and the teachers of the Law started grumbling, "This man welcomes outcasts and even eats with them!" So Jesus told them this parable:

Jesus went on to say, "There was once a man who had two sons. The younger one said to him, 'Father, give me my share of the property now.' So the man divided his property between his two sons. After a few days the younger son sold his part of the property and left home with the money. He went to a country far away, where he wasted his money in reckless living. He spent everything he had. Then a severe famine spread over that country, and he was left without a thing. So he went to work for one of the citizens of that country, who sent him out to his farm to take care of the pigs. He wished he could fill himself with the bean pods the pigs ate, but no one gave him anything to eat. At last he came to his senses and said, 'All my father's hired workers have more than they can eat, and here I am about to starve! I will get up and go to my father and say, "Father, I have sinned against God and against you. I am no longer fit to be called your son; treat me as one of your hired workers."' So he got up and started back to his father.

"He was still a long way from home when his father saw him; his heart was filled with pity, and he ran, threw his arms around his son, and kissed him. 'Father,' the son said, 'I have sinned against God and against you. I am no longer fit to be called your son.' But the father called to his servants. 'Hurry!' he said. 'Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and shoes on his feet. Then go and get the prize calf and kill it, and let us celebrate with a feast! For this son of mine was dead, but now he is alive; he was lost, but now he has been found.' And so the feasting began.

"In the meantime the older son was out in the field. On his way back, when he came close to the house, he heard the music and dancing. So he called

one of the servants and asked him, 'What's going on?' <sup>27</sup> 'Your brother has come back home,' the servant answered, 'and your father has killed the prize calf, because he got him back safe and sound.' The older brother was so angry that he would not go into the house; so his father came out and begged him to come in. But he spoke back to his father, 'Look, all these years I have worked for you like a slave, and I have never disobeyed your orders. What have you given me? Not even a goat for me to have a feast with my friends! But this son of yours wasted all your property on prostitutes, and when he comes back home, you kill the prize calf for him!' 'My son,' the father answered, 'you are always here with me, and everything I have is yours. But we had to celebrate and be happy, because your brother was dead, but now he is alive; he was lost, but now he has been found.'"

The Gospel of Christ...

## Message

Here we are, continuing our journey together. It is a long hard journey, this Lenten journey of faith, and for some of us it has been particularly difficult. The road has many twists and turns and sometimes it feels as if we have lost our way. As we get closer to the end of the path, we find so many rocks and stones in our way. We may stumble and fall, but nothing will stop us from moving forward. Perhaps you will stop and pick up a stone on the road and hold it in your hand. These are the stones we will use as we build God's Kingdom. With that reminder in hand, we move forward, growing closer to our destination... closer to the dark shadows of the cross.

Today, we hear a familiar story, a story that stretches back for generations and stretches forward into our own lives: the echo of children fighting for the love and attention of a parent. You've heard the cries, maybe you've even said them yourself: "Mom loved you best" or "Dad always takes your side!" We remember the people in the story and we relate to them. We take sides, one against another. And we remember other stories that stir memories of old rivalries. Cain killed Abel... Jacob stole Esau's inheritance...

we return to these stories over and over again because they speak to our own experiences.

The story creates so many lasting images. One young man standing out on the road, looking through his father's window and watching others celebrate, a frown twisting his face. Another young man, dressed in rags, tired and alone, walking down the twisting road, stumbling on the stones in the road. Wondering what waits for him at the end of his journey.

And an older man, sitting day after day at his window. Waiting, patiently... desperately... faithfully... Waiting for a miracle... Waiting for a beloved son to come home! Hoping that today his family would finally be complete again...

We return to this story again and again because it is a story of Grace. We experience that grace as we see the Father running out into the road to welcome home his long lost son. And grace is also shown to the other son who is left on the outside, looking in. The father not only wants to share forgiveness with his long-lost son, but he wants to share the joy of forgiving with his loyal son.

We worship a God who is bubbling over with this kind of Grace. We are overwhelmed by the amazing act of forgiveness as we picture God running out into a road to welcome us home, and then we realize that that moment is only the beginning. The grace goes on and on.

The father reminds us that God's grace waits for us as we stumble through life... and grace chases us wherever we go — God is endlessly hopeful that we will be persuaded to embrace new life and new chances.

Grace is a journey and we accompany these three men from this ancient story, on this journey. As we travel on this long and winding road, we discover that we are involved in a dynamic, evolving relationship between us and God and each other.

There was a young woman who experienced that kind of grace. As a child, she was very close to her father. The time she experienced this closeness the most was when they would have big family gatherings with all the aunts and uncles and cousins. At some point, someone would pull out the old record player and put on polka records, and the family would dance. Eventually, someone would put on the "Beer Barrel Polka;" and her father would come up to her, tap her on the shoulder and say, "I believe this is our dance," and they would dance. One time, though, when she was a teenager and in one of those teenaged moods and the "Beer Barrel Polka" began to play and when her father tapped her on the shoulder and said, "I believe this is our dance," she snapped at him, "Don't touch me! Leave me alone!" And her father turned away and never asked her to dance again.

Their relationship was difficult through her teen years. One day she came home late from a date, her father was sitting in his chair, half asleep, wearing an old bathrobe. "What do you think you're doing?" she snarled. "I was just waiting on you," he said sadly

As she grew older, she missed the Daddy she once adored but their relationship felt broken beyond repair. One day she went to a family reunion, and when somebody put on the "Beer Barrel Polka," she drew a deep breath, walked over to her father, tapped him on the shoulder and said, "I believe this is our dance." He turned toward her and said, "I've been waiting on you."

Grace is experienced here, in these moments. Standing at the center of our life is our God who says to us, "Everything I have is yours. All that I am is for you, and I've been waiting on you."

Grace is not forced on us. God will run out and welcome us as we return home, but in our story the Father never forces his son home – doesn't grab him by the ear and drag him back home. God will come out and plead with us to come in to the party but leaves it up to us to respond.

Grace isn't forced upon us, but it is never taken away from us either. God pleads with us to walk in the Light and God waits for us to respond. And when we do, God runs down that stony road to embrace us in love. Can you hear God now?

Praise be to the God who waits for us, who calls us in and who welcomes us with open arms. Who meets us wherever we are on the stony road. Amen

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King's last words on the balcony before his assassination were spoken to musician [Ben Branch](#), who was scheduled to perform that night at an event King was attending: "Ben, make sure you play '[Take My Hand, Precious Lord](#)' in the meeting tonight. Play it real pretty."