

## A Parable

[Luke 15:1-3, 11b-32](#)

The Prodigal Son

The Return of the Prodigal Son

The Elder Brother

The Lost Sons

The Welcoming God

How do you know this most familiar parable? Jesus was speaking to the people, including his disciples, tax collectors, “sinners”, and the people schooled in the Mosaic law and tradition. We think we know it and we do—but its impact in this moment can change us.

I Invite you to reread the story and wonder where you are in this family that Jesus portrayed so vividly. Are you a son or daughter? A parent who wants their lost child back? Are you the responsible one, or are you, perhaps, the one who had to get away or even the one who wants to be welcomed home? What is like to be in the role of parent or grandparent and Love so generously? How do we Love generously the one so different from ourselves?

:"There was a man who had two sons. 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. 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. When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that country, and he began to be in need. 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. He would gladly have filled himself with the pods that the pigs were eating; and no one gave him anything. 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! I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands."' "

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. 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.' 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. And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!' And they began to celebrate.

"Now his elder son was in the field; and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. He called one of the slaves and asked what was going on. He replied, 'Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has got him back safe and sound.' Then he became angry and refused to go in. His father came out and began to plead with him. 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. But when this son of yours came back, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fatted calf for him!' Then the father said to him, 'Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. 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.'" Luke 15:11b-32

When the younger son looked at his life with his family and asked for his share of the inheritance, Jesus was naming something that his listeners at the time would have thought was unthinkable. "Give me father, my share of the inheritance, now, so I may pursue..." We may wonder about his life choices or speculate about the education he would receive or the changes he planned to make in the world, but the listeners heard, Father, I wish you were dead so that I might inherit. Give my inheritance now. Jesus shocked his listeners, and suddenly they were listening. The Father, says yes. If you look carefully in the tree in the drawing by Cara Hochhalter, you will see broken hearts, even as the parents watch their child wave and walk away.



The beginning of the story is gut wrenching on its own. Jesus however, continues; the young adult runs out of money and even his meagre job cannot compare to the life the servants in his parent's home live. And he turns home.

What was he thinking? Was he truly repentant for what he did? Is he sorry for the life experience his inheritance brought him? Would he be accepted back home to work as a servant?



Rembrandt, Return of the Prodigal Son, 1665-1669. St. Peterburg, Russia

The scandal to this shameful situation as Jesus tells it, is that the Father actually runs to meet the beloved child. God welcomes and longs to celebrate the return with joy and gifts and shoes for his feet.

And the elder brother, will he join the celebration of the abundance of God's Love? His Father goes out to meet him also, reminding him that he is always with him. The parallel of the younger son becoming as if a slave and the older son, seeing himself working as though as slave for his father, would not have been lost on Jesus' listeners. Can he in his anger reconcile with his brother who squandered their property, and with his father who turns and loves both sons. Who have we been as sons, daughters and parents in this story?

Who are we now?

Below is a larger version of Rembrandt's return of the Prodigal Son. In the upper left is likely his mother, to the right his older brother. The beloved returned child is on their knees, feet bare and sandals worn. Will the elder brother join the celebration? Jesus does not tell us.

*Pastor Susan*



