

In our text today, Luke sets the scene for the telling of three parables which are found in Luke 15, the parable of the lost sheep [vs. 3-7], the lost coin [vs. 8-10] and the lost boy [vs. 11-32]. The rest of our readings this week will focus on the final parable, the parable of the lost boy. Each of these parables tells the story of something of high value that has been lost and the search that ensues to recover what had gone missing.

Today, take a brief moment to also read Luke 15:8-10. In what way might Jesus be responding to the grumblings of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law by sharing this parable? What might Jesus have been communicating to the tax collectors and “sinners”?

In your reading today, what might Jesus be saying to you? Which should fuel our transformation? Why? Which is fueling your life right now?

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The Parable of the Prodigal Son begins with the introduction of the three central characters. Abruptly, one of the sons requests something from his father that would have been seen as a deeply offensive demand within Jewish culture. The son essentially says to his dad, “I’d be better off if you were already dead. Can I have my inheritance now?” After receiving his portion, this same son travels to a distant land, leaving behind everything his father had ever wanted to provide for his son.

Throughout the biblical story, we read numerous stories of men and women who rebel against God and God’s love. What does this say about our human nature?

Are there moments in your life you might describe as an experience of rebelling against God’s love? Have you ever tried to run away and found yourself trading your father’s treasure for the world’s trash?

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It is probably safe to assume that at least several years had passed before the eventual reunion between father and son. The tasks of life would have certainly continued, but the parable seems to indicate that the father never stopped hoping that his “lost” son would one day return. Though the son claims that he is “no longer worthy” to be called a son, the father calls for the best robe, a ring for his finger, sandals for his feet and for the fatted calf to be killed for a grand feast.

After completely wrecking his life, verse 17 says that the son “came to his senses.” What do you think that means? Have you had a similar experience? How does the son respond to this new awareness?

What do the actions of the father communicate about God’s compassion for God’s lost sons and daughters?

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In our first reading this week, we looked at the setting in which Jesus shares this parable. The Pharisees and tax collectors had grumbled, “This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.” James Bryan Smith writes, “The elder brother represents the part of us that is not comfortable with God’s unconditional love for others or even ourselves.” He continues, “It is not my sin that moves me away from God, it is my refusal of grace for others, both for myself and for others.”

What does the elder brother’s anger say about his relationship with his brother? What does it say about his relationship with his dad? How does the father respond?

What does the father’s words to the elder brother say about the way God loves? How has the story of this father helped you understand the love of your heavenly father?

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