

Sermon
Parables of Lent
“Parable of the Prodigal Son”
Luke 15:1-3, 11b-32
29 Mar 2020

Grace and peace to you from God our Father, and from Jesus Christ, our living Lord and Savior. Amen.

“THAT’S NOT FAIR!”

Have you ever found yourself in a situation you thought wasn’t fair? Maybe you studied for a test all week and got a “C”, while a classmate cheated and got an “A.” Or maybe your team worked hard for years and years and you finally made it to state your senior year, only to have the tournament cancelled due to Coronavirus. Or maybe your friend got a full-ride college scholarship because their parents spent every penny they made on parties, toys and vacations. But you didn’t qualify for a scholarship because your parents pinched pennies and saved for the future. Or maybe you and your spouse have been trying to have a baby for years with no luck, but your co-worker, who didn’t even want to have kids, is now pregnant. Or maybe you and your spouse worked really hard, so one day you could have a good retirement together, but then they died shortly before or after retirement...and your dream of finally spending time together ended way too soon. Those are all certainly situations one could rightly call totally “NOT FAIR!”

UNEXPECTED MERCY

On the other hand, we’ve probably all been in situations where we were thankful we *weren’t* treated “fairly” because we benefited from not being treated fair. Like when my college professor let me skip finals so I could start a summer job before classes let out. Or like when you broke a major rule of your parents, but they still let you go to prom. Or like when you were pulled over AGAIN for speeding on the way to work or school because you couldn’t be late one more time... and the officer let you off with a warning. Or like when your employer gave you months of paid time off, so you could take care of your spouse who was fighting cancer. I’m guessing each of us can relate to and appreciate those and other situations, when we were shown **unexpected** mercy.

INTRO TO PRODIGAL

Well, if you can relate to thinking a situation isn’t fair, or if you can relate to getting something you didn’t deserve, then you can probably relate to both brothers in the Parable of the Prodigal Son. (By the way, a prodigal is someone who spends money wastefully or extravagantly.) As you listen now to the familiar story of the Prodigal Son, try to put yourself in the shoes of both the younger and the older brother.

Luke 15

Now all the tax-collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to him. ²And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, ‘This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them.’ ³ So he told them this parable:

‘There was a man who had two sons. ¹²The 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. ¹³A few days later the younger son gathered all he had and travelled to a distant country, and there he squandered his property in dissolute living. ¹⁴When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that country, and he began to be in need. ¹⁵So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs. ¹⁶He would gladly have filled himself with the pods that the pigs were eating; and no one gave him anything. ¹⁷But 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! ¹⁸I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; ¹⁹I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands.’ ” ²⁰So 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. ²¹Then the son said to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.” ²²But 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. ²³And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; ²⁴for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!” And they began to celebrate.

²⁵ ‘Now his elder son was in the field; and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. ²⁶He called one of the slaves and asked what was going on. ²⁷He replied, “Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has got him back safe and sound.” ²⁸Then he became angry and refused to go in. His father came out and began to plead with him. ²⁹But 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. ³⁰But when this son of yours came back, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fatted calf for him!” ³¹Then the father said to him, “Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. ³²But 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.” ’

GRACE IN GOD'S LAND/WORLD/COUNTRY

Let's see what we can take away from Jesus' parable today. In the Bible, Jesus talks a lot about the Kingdom of God which might be easier for us to understand today as "God's world." In our world, we keep track. We count sins and mistakes.

"Man, I thought he was a Christian- but look how he really messed up."

"She just keeps getting in trouble- I'm glad I'm not like her!"

Yes, we keep track of how many times someone harms us or others, but in God's world, God loves and forgives us whether we deserve it or not. In our world, the younger brother didn't **deserve** mercy and the older brother didn't **understand** mercy. But in God's world, **BOTH** are loved, despite their flaws. That's God's grace, which is underserved love and mercy. Some listening to Jesus tell the story of the Prodigal Son, might've thought the father was foolish to forgive his son like that. I mean, clearly the older brother thought his father was foolish.

But for all of us who've ever messed up, made mistakes, or failed miserably, how good it is to know that in God's world, we are loved no matter what- that God's love is bigger than any mistake we can make. Did U hear that? **God's love is bigger than any mistake we can make.** No matter how foolish you've ever been...no matter how many of God's laws you've broken, or how many times you've run away from God...no matter how self-righteous or judgmental you are, God through Jesus Christ loves you unconditionally! It's what I like to call God's "anyway" love. We mess up over and over, but got loves us **anyway.**

So if you've ever felt like the younger son: eager to get away from home, beaten down by your mistakes, wishing you could get back to how things used to be. Or if you've ever felt like the older son: hardworking, loyal to your family, but resentful of the undeserved good fortunes of another family member who isn't so hardworking or loyal. Then hear these words from God today. You are loved anyways- no matter what, now and forever!

Please join me next Sunday, Palm Sunday, as we follow this same loving Lord to Jerusalem and ultimately to the cross of Good Friday where Jesus shows the ultimate display of his love for us. Amen.

CHILDREN'S SERMON

29 March 2020

Prodigal Son

Good morning kids!

Have any of you ever had a bad day?

Like a day when you got up on the wrong side of bed...

- Imagine you were crabby and argued with your parent
- you wouldn't eat your breakfast
- you missed the bus
- you teased a classmate
- you got in trouble w/teacher

In other words, you sinned over and over and did things you knew you shouldn't?

Imagine as you rode the bus home from school, you began to feel sorry for your mistakes that day, so sorry you began to cry. You decided to apologize to your parent when you got home. But as the bus pulled up to your stop, you noticed your parent was there. They came running up to you and gave you a big hug. They'd already forgiven you and had a big party waiting for you at home- cake, presents, & birthday hats!

That's like the Parable of the Prodigal Son I'll be talking about today. It's a story that teaches us that God loves us no matter what- even if we have a really, really bad day, week, or even years of bad behavior. Jesus loves us anyway, even when we don't deserve it!

Let's Pray