



**PASTOR GWEN'S MESSAGE
4TH SUNDAY OF LENT
"OUR PRODIGAL FATHER"
SUNDAY MARCH 27, 2022**

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

When we were children, we heard the same warnings over and over again:

Don't run with those scissors!

Close the refrigerator door!

Eat your vegetables!

Turn that light off!

Say "please" and "thank you"!

Look both ways before you cross the street!

And as kids we responded with a "Yeah, Yeah, Yeah". Well, mom and dad had a reason for saying those things over and over again. These statements and a plethora of other ones we heard as kids were for our own good. And parents knew that it took a while for kids to get it and remember to do these important things.

I know as a parent I was guilty of repeating these warning or command to my kids too. I hoped that one day my children would remember on their own and do the right thing. And I believe it is a fact of life if you want someone to remember something you said, you must tell them at least 10 times.

I had a boss in real estate that drove that point home. I bet he told this fact way more than 10 times. Over and over again he made this point. If you want

to be remembered as their real estate agent, you need to keep your name in front of them. Yup, you guessed it over and over again!

I do believe that there are a few things in life that we do need to hear over and over again. I don't know about you, but I long to be told "I love you" from my kids, my spouse, and even my friends. Certainly, the fact that God loves us is something we never get tired of hearing and bears repeating. When things are said that are chocked full of meaning, they truly are worth hearing again.

And so, it is with our Gospel story this morning with the parable of the Prodigal Son. It is an important story for Christians everywhere and is worth repeating. It is the story of unapologetic love; the kind of love God has for all of us. What better way to understand God's radical, sacrificial, extravagant love for you and me than in this parable?

As I was working on this message, I heard it told in a little different way by Dr Jeffrey K. London. Here goes his rendition with a more contemporary spin.

There was a man who had two children, the eldest was a girl, the youngest a boy. The man owned a car dealership in Tulsa, Oklahoma and was out on the lot one day when his young son came to him and said, "Dad, I want a new Mercedes convertible and my share of the family fortune and I'll get out of your hair. I'm going off to conquer the world! You'll never hear from me again!"

So, the father regretfully divided up the money and got his young son a Mercedes convertible and waved goodbye. A few days later the young son found himself at a blackjack table in Las Vegas, Sin City. It didn't take long for the young son to lose everything—all the money, the car, everything was gone.

And with nothing left, and after having been kicked out of a comped room at the casino, the young son found himself alone, completely, and utterly alone. With nowhere to go and no money left, the young son was forced to hire himself out as a pool boy to Celine Dion. It proved to be a horrible existence.

But then one day the young son came to his senses. He looked around at what had become of his life and proclaimed out loud, "How many of my Dad's employees have it better than this! Here I am with nothing, barely existing as a pool boy and I can't get that Titanic song

out of my head! I know what I'll do. I'll go to my Dad and say to him. 'Dad, I really messed up. I mean, I really, really messed up. I well, . . . I . . . I sinned. I sinned against you, and I sinned against God. I squandered everything, it's all gone, so I don't even have a peace offering to lay before you. But maybe, just maybe, you'll consider taking me back as one of your employees!'"

So, the young son set off from home. When his Dad saw him coming down Memorial, he jumped for joy and ran out into busy traffic and put his arms around his son and gave him, a nuggie. Then the young son said to him, "Dad, I really blew it, I messed up big time I'm a loser. I sinned against you and God. I lost everything. Can I have a job?"

But his Dad said, "Nonsense!" And then his Dad proceeded to tell one of his employees, "Run up to Saks Fifth Avenue and get the best suit and shoes they have and get him an i-phone., the newest version available. And then call the caterer because we're going to have a party, for my young son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!" And then the party began.

But the elder daughter was in the lot selling cars when suddenly she heard that titanic song blaring over the loudspeakers and lots of laughing coming from the showroom. So, the elder daughter called one of the employees and asked what was going on. She was told that her loser brother had returned, and their Dad was throwing a party for him.

Well, that made her mad, really mad. So mad that she locked herself in a mini-van and refused to come out. Her Dad came out and pleaded with her to come join the party, but she refused. Eventually she rolled down the window and said to her Dad, "Listen, I've been working myself to the bone all these years! You never threw a party for me and my friends! You never called the caterer for me! I've done everything you've told me to do and then some! You'd think I would be the one you were proud of and grateful for, not 'Doofus' over there! HE comes home after carousing with prostitutes and losing everything and you treat him like he's something special! What about me? Remember me? I'm the faithful one! Where's the justice? Have I been good all these years for nothing? I want to belong too! I

want to be loved too! Will somebody please tell me how to earn your love?

Then her Dad said to her, "Daughter, you are always with me. Everything I have is yours. But we had to celebrate and throw a party, because your brother was. . . your brother was Celine Dion's pool boy! And now he's back with us; he was dead and now he's alive; he was lost and now he's found!"

I think you get the idea that it does not matter how you set the story, the message is the same. It also does not matter how many times you have heard this parable; the message is the same. It is a timeless story. It is a priceless story we need to hear over and over again.

So, what is the message here? Well, I think there is not just one message in this ageless story. What does Jesus want us to hear and remember in this parable of the Prodigal Son? What is the good news in it? First, I ask do you know what the word prodigal means? We do not use this word much today, but it has a negative connotation. Prodigal means generous, abundant, or wasteful. As an adjective our dictionary says it means someone lavish in giving. As a noun it is a person who spends lavishly. So, it is not necessarily a bad trait to have, to be excessive, extravagant, lavish, and unrestrained.

The Gospel writers, Luke in this case did not name this parable. That came much later in history, and I think they got it wrong. I think that the title of this story should be the Prodigal Father. I think one of the lessons to learn is that our Father in Heaven is a most forgiving, prodigal dad in the most positive sense of the word. He lavishly extends his love to us whether we deserve it or not. He is extravagant with his forgiveness and excessive with His goodness to all His children.

On the other hand, the children are also prodigals but in the negative sense. They are wasteful, reckless, and extravagant in their own way. They have fallen away from the family values and are selfish. They are lost and rebellious against their father.

So, who are you in this story? I think at different times and stages in life we can admit that we have been both the daughter and the son. How about you? Or are you the father? Maybe we do see a little of each of these characters in

the story in our own selves. Do you also see love and justice in this parable in different forms at different times?

To me the message of this story is that we have a God, our Father, that claims us as his children. He is a prodigal father in that He lavishes excessive love on us, no matter what we have done to upset or sadden Him. That love is called Jesus Christ, his only Son, who he sent to be put to death for our sake, extravagantly giving up his life so we could have forgiveness, abundant and everlasting life with Him. Our loving Father loves us so much. And he tells us that over and over again. Hearing that reassurance, I know that "My heart will go on." **AMEN**