

**7-7-19 PARABLES OF JESUS – THE PRODIGAL SON
(aka A FATHER & TWO SONS) Luke 15:11-31**

Whew!!! What a few days we've had!

Last Thursday, Kirsten loaded up her car... packed in as much of her 'stuff' (mostly clothes) as she could yet still preserve a very small space in the back seat for her 2 'blind' cats and headed out of Los Angeles to come home to Erie before moving on to her new home in Washington, DC before the end of July.

We checked in with Kirsten every 3-4 hours. We texted ... and I tracked her progress on a map ... including where she stayed every night ... we were anticipating and praying and looking for her return. We were JUBILANT when we finally saw her!

Linda and I shared how hard it must be to be a parent and not know where your child is ... or whether they are safe ... our hearts would ache, and we'd look every day for their return longing for their return... some of you may relate ... we feel for you... and pray

THEN, on Tuesday, I came home for lunch and to my ecstatic surprise --- Kaitlin and her fiancé, JT surprised us with an unexpected visit!!! I had not seen them since last October. For lots of reasons we did not expect to see them until a few days before their wedding in California on August 10. WOW! WHAT A JOY TO SEE THEM!

How wonderful it is to be reunited with a child ... what a joy!!!

Today's parable is often referred to as "THE PRODIGAL SON" ... but MORE THAN A STORY OF A WAYWARD CHILD STUMBLING HOME, the parable is really about the AMAZING LOVE OF A PARENT AND HOW JESUS RELATES THAT INCREDIBLE PARENTAL LOVE TO BE A SMALL MEASURE OF GOD'S INCOMPREHENSIBLE LOVE AND EMBRACE FOR ALL HIS CHILDREN... It is also a parable with a socially political and poignant highlight that contrasts the arrogant pride and self-righteous attitudes of the oldest son to that of the religious establishment of Jesus' time versus the repentant and humble attitudes of those responding to Jesus' extension of welcome & embrace to those wanting to be restored and renewed in the love and embrace of God ... AND IN SO DOING ... Jesus highlights for us, GOD's heart --- a heart of love and of desire to be connected to ALL OF HIS CHILDREN ...

TODAY'S MAIN POINTS:

1. GOD's LOVE FOR ALL OF HIS CHILDREN IS INCOMPREHENSIBLE
Jesus uses the illustration of a loving and extending father as a mere example of God's far more extensive love for each of us.
2. Being 'apart' from GOD takes a toll .. SIN HAS A COST.
 - 1) the 'younger son' &
 - 2) the 'older son'
3. God does not sit passively--by merely 'waiting' for the 'lost to be found' ... but actively SEEKS to RENEW & RECONNECT – TO BRING ALL PEOPLE BACK INTO THE FAMILY FOLD GOD really cares for ALL PEOPLE ---SUCH AN understanding of God being so extending and proactive was incredibly counter-cultural in Jesus' time. ARE WE AT SHUMC SHOWING THE WORLD AN EXTENDING & CARING GOD or a CRITICAL GOD?
4. IT IS INCREDIBLY IMPORTANT TO CELEBRATE & REJOICE --- TO "TELL THE WORLD" and TO AFFIRM TO ONE ANOTHER that 'the family' is being RESTORED, RENEWED & RESET. REUNIONS are SPECIAL!!!! If there is a celebration in heaven for every soul restored to God's family --- should we too rejoice and celebrate the joys of being a part of God's family?

"The PRODIGAL SON" Luke 15:11-31 CONTEXT:

Luke 15:1-2 The religious establishment was 'ticked off' and "muttered". They DID NOT APPROVE OF JESUS' WELCOMING & ASSOCIATING with sinners...EVEN eating with them!

SO --- JESUS TELLS 3 STORIES with a POINT:

1. **The parable of the lost sheep (Luke 15:3-7):**
 - A SHEPHERD goes out to rescue a lost sheep
 - Every "save" is worth a 'high five' and a celebration ☺
2. **The parable of the lost coin (Luke 15:8-10):**
 - A woman searches for a lost coin (lottery ticket?)
 - She 'rejoices' ... when all things are back & in place ☺
3. **The parable of a father's love & 2 sons (Luke 11-31):**
 - A Father loves his sons --- even though BOTH turn from him & insult him ... even hurt him ...
 - The father hosts a party reintroducing his son to the community

THE TEXT:

WHAT DOES THE PASSAGE SAY?

WHO ARE THE CHARACTERS?

HOW WOULD YOU ASSESS THE SITUATION?

WHAT ARE YOUR IMPRESSIONS OR HOLY SPIRIT 'INKLINGS'?

1. Old Testament imagery of God was as a KING
New Testament imagery per Jesus was to portray God as loving & caring FATHER & much more personal & individual
2. Inheritance rules -- Older Son = 2/3 and younger son = 1/3
3. YOUNGER SON --- Can you relate?
4. The insolence of the 'younger' son presumed that the father is already dead. The son's emphatic move 'to another country' further highlights the son's condemnation of his father.
5. The younger son depicts the Epitome of a "sinner."
 - Prideful, presuming, arrogant
 - Indulgent, impatient
 - Self-consumed & unaware
6. The 'older son' was judgmental and critical of such obstinacy and rebellion, yet, WHAT WAS HIS attitude & relationship with his father?
 - Did not share the Father's loves and passions for the farm or the family
 - Was also critical and judgmental towards the father and son
 - Refuses to sit at the father's right hand
 - Also denied the father's love

ROBE = HONOR

RING = MASTERY

SANDALS = "FAMILY"

Can you --- can we relate to either son? Are you, are we guilty?

HOW OUGHT THE SONS ACTED?

WHAT, IF ANYTHING, ARE YOU BEING LED TO THINK OR DO? DO YOU DESIRE TO RENEW & REFRESH YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD?

DO YOU FEEL THE NEED TO RENEW & REFRESH YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUR SIBLINGS --- in your earthly family? In your church family?

WHAT KIND OF EXAMPLE OF GOD'S LOVE, CARE and UNITY IS THE CHURCH IN TODAY'S WORLD?

A GOOD EXAMPLE OR A BAD EXAMPLE? LIKE THE OLDER SON?

APPLICATIONS:

HOW ARE WE EXTENDING GOD'S LOVE & GRACE TOWARDS THOSE WHO MAY BE CONSIDERED 'UNDESIRABLE'?

ARE WE A TOLERANT CHURCH or AN INTOLERANT CHURCH?

DOES SHUMC "CELEBRATE" & "REJOICE" in the HOMECOMING of the 'lost' or "cutoff?" DO WE CELEBRATE THE "PRODIGAL" FINDING THEIR WAY HOME?

ARE WE A GOOD EXAMPLE OF THE FATHER'S EXTENDING LOVE AND WELCOME --- ENCOURAGEMENT & EMBRACE?

ARE WE WILLING, ABLE & WANTING to RECEIVE THOSE THAT ARE "FRESH OUT OF THE SWINE PENS" OF LIFE?

DO WE PLEDGE TO BE EXTENDING TO THOSE ON THE FRINGES OF SOCIETY & LIFE? WHO MAY TEST OUR TOLERANCES?

WHAT MAY BE EXAMPLES OF THE FATHER'S ROBE, RING, & SANDALS in TODAY'S CONTEXT?

PRAYER: Dear God, we acknowledge that the prodigal's father is YOU. Dear God ... we are YOUR children ... THANK YOU for 'leaving the lights on' and for seeking us ... searching for us ... and welcoming us as we recognize our need AND DESIRE to live in Your household – the 'family of God' as you intended from the beginning. We are sorry for all that we have done that has effectively denied you, sinned against you and cut us off from you. THANK YOU for welcoming us back into the family. And thank you for showing us in today's parables the rejoicing that occurs in heaven every time a wayward child comes back into the life-giving fold of Your love & protection. We pray also that SHUMC may be a life-giving source of your extending love and welcome to ALL with whom SHUMC may reach & extend. IN Jesus' name, AMEN.