**Humor vs. Humility**

**Vicar Vince Piekarski**

**Fourth Sunday in Lent**

**March 30th, 2025**

**Luke 15:1-3, 11b-32**

“Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” (2 Corinthians 1:2, NRSV) (2) **Amen.**

I would bet that we all know this story about the Prodigal Son and his brother all too well. I would bet that we all have heard or read this story several times over the years. I would even bet that we all have lived out this story a time or two in our very own lives whether we want to admit to it or not.

To that very fact, I will take the first step, I will admit to it, I will reopen my very own wounds. I will tell you all that I really despise this very story in our Lectionary Cycle. Even though I am still early on in my preaching years, and I do not have a lot of sermons to look back on. However, I had the luxury of preaching on this three years ago when Pastor Leah was out sick or on vacation, and now I get to visit it yet again. God’s sense of humor having me read, study, and even prepare another sermon further adds salt to that proverbial wound. Now, I do come to realize that my anger and resentment have subsided some over the years, but I also admit that they are still ever so present as well. Perhaps this time around I really need to transfer my mindset and perception I have about this story from God’s humor to God’s humility. With that being said, I realize there is some additional work to do, and in that additional work I would then need to find the best definition or understanding of humility. In doing so, and internet resource provided me with what I felt lined things up the best to my understanding and my mentality at this moment. This resource informs us that, “Humility and faith are intertwined, as humility allows us to trust in God's wisdom rather than our own understanding. By humbling ourselves, we open our hearts to God's guidance and place our faith in His plans for us.” (4)

Yes, I had to open my heart yet again. Let alone in another way that I really never imagined. For this very story still seems to evoke way too many memories and pains, but that is precisely what I need to deal with time and time again to eventually be able to grow and humble myself. As a matter of fact, through my studies and time in the ministry, I realize more and more that I need to quit trying to deal with things on my own and through my own understanding, and I really need to just give it up to God. Now, of course that is easier said than done. However, for my faith and trust to further develop I need to fully submit myself to it. I also realize that I need to set the example to promote that you even to consider doing the same thing. During this season of Lent, at this very moment, through this scripture today, we really do get humor versus humility on display. We can continue taking the punches, or we can continue to embrace God, and let him do the work in and through us.

Now, since you all are probably out there thinking that I am speaking in hieroglyphics or something, and I cannot expect you to remember my story or part of my sermon from three years ago, let me share a bit of my personal story in relation to this parable. Let’s put some things into context here before we move on together. So, essentially, I have a lot of those runner-up or second place trophies and certificates in my history. Yes, I also won my fair share of things as well, but the accolades were not always mine like I felt they should have been. To that point putting me in the very sandals of the brother who chose to stay home and do right by his father. Yes, I come to realize that others win at times. However, the way they won, or the lack of effort I felt they put behind things, versus what I know I did myself, did not have me seeing that they deserved the accolades and respect that victory provides. I feel as if they received things as a consolation at times, even at the very expense of myself. Now, I know that sounds rather self-centered or even greedy, and I am on full display here more than I can admit than I am comfortable with. However, this is what we are called to in this season of Lent. These forty days provide for a deeper dive and self-reflection on our faith, on who we are, and also what we desire in the future.

I will admit that I am not very proud of my thoughts and my actions in the past, and even now at times too. I am not proud of the anger and resentment that still seems to live in my mind and heart, even though it has dissipated some over time. That has me thinking that I am quite sure the other son in our story is not very happy with the way he acted, or even reacted for that fact, when his brother returned and there was a party going on in his honor. However, that is a rather natural response that quite frankly any single one of us would probably have or have had in the past. For if we are the ones that stayed and did the right things, if we are the ones that worked our tails off, and if others get the blessings or the spoils then we feel betrayed or slighted. However, that is not what we are or should be working towards. For we have heard time and time again in scripture that the first will be last, and the last will be first. Let that really sink in here. The first will be last, and the last will be first. It is ever so deep. Especially when we bring it into real terms in relation to our very own life and experiences, and this very story in our Gospel Reading today.

I am also not happy to admit or say that I really can be one of those Pharisees or scribes that are grumbling and questioning everything. At times I am so focused on doing right, or achieving, or even perfection, that I forget that I live an extremely flawed and undeserving life of grace and blessings as well. For without God, without his actions, without his love, without his very forgiveness, and without all that he provides and does I would have or even be nothing. None of us would be for that fact.

We as the very children of God tend to look at this story and the title of this very scripture in the entirely wrong perspective all too often. This is where I call you and I to change the very sandals that we have on our feet. This is where I call you and I to change the very position that we have been looking at this story at. Whether you have been in one or both of the sons’ sandals before, this is precisely where I call you to put yourselves in the very sandals of the Father. Now, I know this might be easy to a degree for some of you out there, because I know that a good majority of you are parents. However, that does not mean you have truly been looking at this story in our Gospel Reading from the correct position and stance all of these years now either. As a matter of fact, I even propose that the correct or even better suited title for this story that we have in front of us should actually be, The Parable of the Father’s Unconditional Love. Let me repeat and submit that to you all once again… The Parable of the Father’s Unconditional Love.

Do you see it? Do you hear it? Can you really take a step back with me and change your sandals and observe this very story from the position of the Father? Is it weird or awkward to you? Does it go against every conventional thought and concept you have come to know and understand after all of these years hearing and reading this familiar parable time and time again?

Well, let me tell you that this is the very blessing of studying scripture together folks. This is the very reason I do my best to thank you in each and every one of my sermons. I do not do it because I feel that I have to, or because it is some checkbox on my list of sermon compilation. However, I really thank you because I mean it. Without you, without having to get up here in this pulpit and be vulnerable, without really having to study and dive into the text, this position is nothing more than regurgitating words and summarizing things to you as if I were providing some kind of book report.

That is what makes preaching different. That is what makes this call to discipleship precious. Being able to help myself and you all have another take on scripture, and to think differently is so cool. Let alone to rip off band-aids I do not even realize I still have on, and some you that you may still have had on is awesome as well. I am very sure we can see ourselves in every character’s sandals in this story at various points in our lives. However, we need to really adjust our focus more on the father than we ever have before. We need to do that for this Gospel Reading, and we need to do that in our very own lives each day as we focus on our Triune God, and the unconditional love shown throughout several points and times in our lives. Without this unconditional love, without this grace, without scripture we would be struggling to identify what we really do believe in. Our faith is ever so interesting because we have a God who is just like the father in this Gospel Reading. He is accepting, forgiving, loving, and rejoicing over the lost son who went out and squandered it all, was lost, and now is found. He is accepting, forgiving, loving, and rejoicing over the son who stayed with him and was so focused on the responsibilities and doing right that he was actually lost in the presence of his father, and he is now found.

I really do hope that shifting your mindset a little bit, making you step into the sandals of the father, and creating a different space for understanding and appreciation of this parable help you more so in this journey during Lent, and your continued faith journey in life as well. I really do hope that this story has you yet again realizing that our Triune God, showers us with acceptance, forgiveness, and love way more than we can ever imagine. And more so, that our Triune God, rejoices every single time that we realize that we have messed up whether we realize it or not. He rejoices in our return! Our Triune God always has open arms for us. Lent may be a season of forty days of preparation and all, but let it be a season that carries on throughout the entire year. Let us prepare our hearts, minds, and ourselves for the best that is here and now, and the best there is in eternity as well!

**Amen.**

**References & Study Points**

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 March 30th, 2025

 Fourth Sunday in Lent

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(3) The Four Pages of The Sermon

 Revised and Updated

 A Guide to Biblical Preaching

 Paul Scott Wilson

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(4) What is Humility? Bible Meaning and Importance for Christians

 Updated: Sep 12, 2024

 Brannon Deibert: SEO Editor

 https://www.christianity.com/wiki/christian-terms/what-does-humility-mean-in-the-

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(5) 3/27/22

 Love for the Lost

 Vincent Piekarski

 Luke 15:1-3, 11b-32

(6) WorkingPreacher.org

 Fourth Sunday in Lent

 Preaching much-beloved parables is both a blessing and an immense challenge.

 March 31, 2019

 Commentary on Luke 15:1-3, 11b-32

 Amanda Brobst-Renaud

(7) WorkingPreacher.org

 Fourth Sunday in Lent

 God’s prodigal love

 March 27, 2022

 Commentary on Luke 15:1-3, 11b-32

 Niveen Sarras

(8) WorkingPreacher.org

 Fourth Sunday in Lent

 It was early September of 2001.1

 March 6, 2016

 Commentary on Luke 15:1-3, 11b-32

 Sharon H. Ringe

(9) WorkingPreacher.org

 Fourth Sunday in Lent

 There was a time when the lectionary known to most churches of the West did not

 include the Parable of the Prodigal Son at all, even though it is surely one of the best

 known of Jesus’ parables.

 March 10, 2013

 Commentary on Luke 15:1-3, 11b-32

 Arland J. Hultgren

(10) WorkingPreacher.org

 Fourth Sunday in Lent

 Hearing this parable can be like hearing from a longtime friend. Strong memories

 rush in, and we are eager to resume conversation with a familiar voice.

 March 14, 2010

 Commentary on Luke 15:1-3, 11b-32

 Matt Skinner

(11) SermonCentral.com

 The Loving, Waiting Father Series

 Contributed by Garth Wehrfritz- Hanson on Nov 28, 2017

 Scripture: Luke 15:1-32

 Denomination: Lutheran

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 Contributed by Mary Erickson on Apr 3, 2019

 Scripture: Luke 15:1-3, Luke 15:11-32, 2 Corinthians 5:16-21

 Denomination: Lutheran

(13) Taking Faith Home

 March 30, 2025

 Fourth Sunday in Lent

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**Luke 15:1-3, 11b-32**

Jesus tells a parable about a son who ponders his father’s love only after he has spurned it. The grace he receives is beyond his hopes. That same grace is a crisis for an older brother who believes it is his obedience that has earned his place in the father’s home.

1 Now all the tax collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to [Jesus.] 2 And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, “This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them.

3 So he told them this parable: 11b “There was a man who had two sons. 12 The younger of them said to his father, ‘Father, give me the share of the wealth that will belong to me.’ So he divided his assets between them. 13 A few days later the younger son gathered all he had and traveled to a distant region, and there he squandered his wealth in dissolute living. 14 When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that region, and he began to be in need. 15 So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that region, who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs. 16 He would gladly have filled his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, and no one gave him anything. 17 But when he came to his senses he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired hands have bread enough and to spare, but here I am dying of hunger! 18 I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; 19 I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands.” ’ 20 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. 21 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.’ 22 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. 23 And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate, 24 for 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 as he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. 26 He called one of the slaves and asked what was going on. 27 He replied, ‘Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf because he has got him back safe and sound.’ 28 Then he became angry and refused to go in. His father came out and began to plead with him. 29 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. 30 But when this son of yours came back, who has devoured your assets with prostitutes, you killed the fatted calf for him!’ 31 Then the father said to him, ‘Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. 32 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.’ ”