

THE PRAYER OF THE DAY

Lay Minister: Let us pray.

People: **(In Unison) God of all mercy, by your power to heal and to forgive, graciously cleanse us from all sin and make us strong; through your son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.**

THE GOSPEL LESSON Luke 15:1-3, 11-32 page

(The love of the Heavenly Father for His wayward children continues to amaze.)

¹ Now the tax collectors and "sinners" were all gathering around to hear him.

² But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them."

³ Then Jesus told them this parable:

⁴ *"Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Does he not leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it?*

⁵ *And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders*

⁶ *and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.'*

⁷ *I tell you that in the same way **there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent.***

⁸ *"Or suppose a woman has ten silver coins and loses one. Does she not light a lamp, sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it?*

⁹ *And when she finds it, she calls her friends and neighbors together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost coin.'*

¹⁰ *In the same way, **I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.***"

¹¹ Jesus continued: "There was a man who had two sons.

¹² The younger one said to his father, 'Father, give me my share of the estate.' So he divided his property between them.

¹³ "Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living.

¹⁴ After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need.

¹⁵ So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs.

¹⁶ He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything.

¹⁷ "When he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired men have food to spare, and here I am starving to death!

¹⁸ I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you.

¹⁹ I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired men.'

²⁰ So he got up and went to his father. "But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and **was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his**

arms around him and kissed him.

²¹ "The son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.'

²² "But the father **said to his servants, 'Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet.**

²³ **Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate.**

²⁴ **For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' So they began to celebrate.**

²⁵ "Meanwhile, the older son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing.

²⁶ So he called one of the servants and asked him what was going on.

²⁷ 'Your brother has come,' he replied, 'and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.'

²⁸ "The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him.

²⁹ But he answered his father, 'Look! All these years I've been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends.

³⁰ But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!'

³¹ "'My son,' the father said, 'you are always with me, and everything I have is yours.

³² But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.'" (NIV)

INTRO - Some of you have heard this story, but others have not, and, it helps us to understand the Gospel lesson today.

In March of 1961 I was in second grade at Maple Street School, in Easthampton, MA. One day after school in March my brother and I were at the home of the Kesslers. Now, you have to know that March in Massachusetts is breakup time. David was two years younger than I was. I'm not sure what he did, but we always seemed to fighting, and I pushed and he fell backwards into a puddle of cold water, ice, and mud. He was immediately soaked, and cold and muddy, and this little kindergartner came out of the puddle crying, and ran home to my mom. When I arrived home she told me, 'You go to your room. Your father will take care of you when he gets home.' I was in for it. So, I threw some of my clothes together, I opened my window, pushed out the storm window, crawled out and ran into the woods, and walked to the home of an older boy I knew. 'My parents said I can come to your house,' I said. I had done something wrong, so I ran away.

I. In our lesson for today, a famous story sometimes called the Prodigal Son, we have the parable of Jesus of a young man who had run away.

A. I had done wrong, yes, and I knew it. But this young man had knowingly done wrong too.

1. In asking for his inheritance while his dad was still alive, he forced his dad to liquidate some property, and basically said, I wish you were dead.

2. He not only ran away from home, he wasted his inheritance, and worse, he wasted it on parties and sex.

3. This young man had done differently than me, he ran away, and then did even more wrong,

rather than doing wrong and running away.

B. Do you know why Jesus told this story? He told it because some people felt that there were those God did not love.

1. According to verses 1-3 of our lesson, Jesus was eating with tax collectors, people known to be thieves and traitors.
2. Jesus was eating with prostitutes, and caring for them.
3. The religious leaders thought Jesus, this teacher of God, was wrong to eat with these sinners. God couldn't love these people.
4. And, these sinners thought God could not love them either, at least not till Jesus spent time with them.

C. There are people today who feel God can't love certain kinds of folks.

1. Some Christians wrongly look down on those who live a sinful life.
2. Some people who don't go to church think they've done too much bad for God to love them.
3. Some people who don't believe in God think that if there is a God he's got a special place in hell for them.
4. People are still thinking in the same way that caused Jesus to tell this story.

II. So Jesus told this parable of the Prodigal Son, and two others.

A. In the parable of the lost sheep, the lost was found, and brought home. Jesus says, ***there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent.***

1. In the parable of the lost coin, the lost one is found.
2. Jesus tells the religious leaders, and he tells the tax collectors and prostitutes, ***I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.***

B. And then Jesus tells the story of the lost or Prodigal Son.

1. Did the son do wrong? Yes obviously?
2. Why did the Father let him go? Was the sin ok? No, but while the world into which the younger son went was dangerous, perhaps more dangerous to his relationship with his father was his bad attitude of taking his father's love for granted, being ungrateful, not appreciating what he had.

C. Did the Father hate the lost son?

1. The Father longed for, he ached for, **was filled with compassion for** the lost son.
2. When the Son came home the Father, in an era when it was considered inappropriate for grown men to run, we are told of the Father that he **ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.**
3. When the Son came home confessing his wrong, appreciating what He had, not even thinking His Father could love him, the Father told **his servants, 'Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. ²³ Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. ²⁴ For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.'** So they began to celebrate. ,
4. While the Father hated the sin of the son, the rebellion, the drunkenness, the sexual immorality, the Father loved the Son, and welcomed Him back with open arms and a party to end all parties.

III. Today is Friendship Sunday. It is important for us to hear the message of this story.

A. God wants church people to hear it, because, this story was really told in response to the criticism of the church people.

1. There is no one God does not love.
2. God so love THE WORLD that he sent His only begotten son, that whoever believe in His

should not perish but have eternal life.

3. No, God does not love the sin, but you know what, Christians are sinners too, who need a Savior. It is a sin not to love those God loves.

B. God wants those who aren't church people to hear this story of the Father's love.

1. There is no one who can't turn from their sin, turn to the arms of the Father, and come home.

2. That is really what repentance and what faith is, trusting God enough to come home.

3. Welcome today to all sinners, church people and visitors. Welcome home to the Father's loving arms.

C. Jesus tells this story so we understand the depth of the Father's love.

1. While the love of the Father in this story is amazing, the love of God is more amazing.

2. The Heavenly Father not only accepts sinners when they come home, he goes looking for them by sending His Son from heaven to earth.

3. The Heavenly Father not only accepts sinners when they come home, he lets his Son Jesus pay the price for people who have rebelled and run from Him. He lets his Son pay the price through His death on the cross.

4. Sometimes, knowing who are Father is makes all the difference.

A Seminary professor was vacationing with his wife in Gatlinburg, Tennessee . One morning, they were eating breakfast in a little restaurant, hoping to enjoy a quiet, family meal. While they were waiting for their food, they noticed a distinguished looking, white haired man moving from table to table, visiting with the guests. The professor leaned over and whispered to his wife, "I hope he doesn't come over here." But sure enough, the man did come over to their table. "Where are you folks from?" he asked in a friendly voice. "Oklahoma," they answered. "Great to have you here in Tennessee," the stranger said. "What do you do for a living?" "I teach at a seminary," he replied. "Oh, so you teach preachers how to preach, do you? Well, I've got a really good story for you." And with that, the gentleman pulled up a chair and sat down at the table with the couple. The professor groaned and thought to himself, "Great, just what I need--another preacher story!"

The man started, "See that mountain over there?" (pointing out a restaurant window). "Not far from the base of that mountain, there was a boy born to an unwed mother. He had a hard time growing up, because every place he went, he was always asked the same question. "Hey boy, who's your daddy?" Whether he was at school, in the grocery store or drug store, people would ask the same question. "Who's your daddy?" He would hide at recess and lunchtime from other students. He would avoid going into stores because that question hurt him so much. When he was about 12 years old, a new preacher came to his church. He would always go in late and slip out early to avoid hearing the question, "Who's your daddy?" But one day, the new preacher said the benediction so fast, he got caught and had to walk out with the crowd. Just about the time he got to the back door, the new preacher, not knowing anything about him put his hand on his shoulder and asked him, "Son, who's your daddy?" The whole church got deathly quiet. He could feel every eye in the church looking at him. Now everyone would finally know the answer to the question, "Who's your daddy?" The new preacher, though, sensed the situation around him and using discernment that only the Holy Spirit could give, said the following to the scared little boy. "Wait a minute!" he said. "I know who you are. I see the family resemblance now. You are a child of God." With that, he patted the boy on his shoulder and said. "Boy, you've got a great inheritance. Go and claim it."

With that, the boy smiled for the first time in a long time and walked out the door a changed person. He was never the same again. Whenever anybody asked him, "Who's your daddy?" he'd just tell them, "I'm a child of God." The distinguished gentleman got up from the table and said, "Isn't that a great story?" The professor responded that it really was a great story! As the man turned to leave, he said, "You know, if that new preacher hadn't told me that I was one of God's children, I probably would never have amounted to anything!" And he walked away.

The seminary professor and his wife were stunned. He called the waitress over and asked her, "Do you know that man who just left that was sitting at our table?" The waitress grinned and said, "Of course. Everybody here knows him. That's Ben Hooper. He's the former governor of Tennessee!"

CONCLUSION - When my folks found out I had run away somehow they contacted my uncle, a teacher at my

school. He knew my relationship of friendship with this older boy, and he came and found me, and brought me home. All the way home I was scared. I was in trouble before. Now, I had run away and I would be in MORE trouble. But, instead of the spanking I deserved, when I got home my mom welcomed me with tears in her eyes and the biggest hug I ever received, my dad patting me on the back. They wanted their wandering, rebellious, misguided son home.

Whoever you are today, church member or visitor, I hope you know there are times you have been rebellious, unloving, that you have turned away from God. But, God wants you to know that He loves you, especially in Jesus. Today again he calls you to trust his love and forgiveness in Jesus, He calls you home to His open arms. Amen.