

Lost and Found
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If there is a parable that captures the flavor of the kingdom,

If there is one parable that expresses the heart of God,

If there is one parable that gives me hope, this is it.

The prodigal son as we classically know it, is in a trio of stories in Luke 15 about losing and finding.

It's in the "lost and found" section of the Bible

One story is about the lost sheep where the fellow has a hundred sheep and he loses one and he goes out to find it.

Then there is the woman who has the lost coin and sweeps everywhere until she finds it.

Then we have this parable is about the lost boy.

As I said, some people call it the story of the prodigal son.

Some people call it the story of the gracious father...or the prodigal father too - because **Prodigal means what?**

Wasteful and lavish...and we think of the son being wasteful and lavish with the father's money/inheritance

But actually this is supposed to be a story about the father – not the son - who was wasteful and lavish with his grace...

But here is the principle,

If you lose something valuable, you never stop looking for it.

God considers each one of you extremely valuable.

If you are lost, he wants to find you today

I pushed search on my laptop the other day...to find a website...and that google ball started to spin...

I clicked on it and it said, **Still searching...**

And I said out loud to that ball– stop searching!

Stop spinning and spinning.

I have other things to do...

I had to shut the whole laptop down in order for the searching spinning ball to go away

But God keeps searching like that

Never gives up

Always seeks out the lost. Always is waiting and ready for us to come home to him again

These past two days have been kind of stressful for me

My Mom has really gone down hill with a kind of dementia that makes her disoriented and forgetful

So these past two days, we have been moving her up from Southern CA closer to us...

She is getting lost a lot, and at one point a couple weeks ago we didn't know where she was

It was terribly scary for her to get lost like this, and not have any sense of orientation

And we were beside ourselves

After waiting for hours wondering where she was, the police found her and called us...and I was incredibly relieved

She was fine...they had found her and brought her back home

My Mom has not been easy to live with...not an easy person for anyone...but neither was this kid in the story

This story is so famous because its an amazing tale.

The characters are great.

It has sharp drama.

It has arrogance and passion and depression and father/son stuff and sibling rivalry.

It has anger and jealousy and restoration and it has a party at the end.

Who doesn't like a party at the end?

It is pretty clear that the father is God, and the elder brother represents the self-righteous religious leaders

But the parent/child part of this is really touching.

First of all, this story is unbelievable.

I mean it is unbelievable.

If you are a listener in the Middle Eastern culture, you can't believe this story because back then, this isn't the way life works

You literally couldn't believe what Jesus tells the crowd this father does for his son.

The parable opens with the younger son asking for his share of the estate.

He was probably a teen-ager.

It's interesting the phrase in the original language for inheritance means life.

He wants his portion of what his father's life will leave him.

In this context, the older son would get two-thirds and the younger son would get one-third.

In Jewish thinking, in their writings, you would never divide the estate early.

You wouldn't do it.

But this is essentially what the younger son is saying.

He is saying, "Dad, drop dead".

I wish you were dead so I could have my part of your life (your inheritance)

The father in that case would backhand the son with his left hand literally and send him out of the house.

The shame of a son acting this way, was so huge; that's why the listeners wouldn't believe it.

But in this parable, the father says ok, here's your third.

This story pictures God the Father letting us sinners go our own way.

We have three children and when they were little – especially around two – they wanted to do everything themselves.

One of them would say all the time, “No! Me do it! Me do it!”

“Let me help you”, we would say, “pour the juice”.

No! Me do it! Me do it!

And the juice spilled everywhere.

This is that picture.

I'll do it myself and the father says ok, do it yourself.

And of course on his own the son loses everything. He blew it! He squandered it.

The text said he scattered his resources.

He threw his money away.

He ends up slopping pigs – the worst possible job for a Jewish boy.

It doesn't get any worse than that.

He is so hungry that he wants to eat the slop he is feeding the pigs.

The son reflects on his condition and the text says that he came to himself.

The Middle Eastern view of this is not repentance though.

Rather, he thickened his skin and said, I haven't been too smart up to this point but let me see if I can make a plan.

Coming to himself means that he creates a plan.

He devised his plan to go to his dad and say,

Father, I have sinned against heaven and I have offended God and I have offended you and I am no longer worthy to be called your son, make me like one of your hired servants.

You see, he is still self centered. He is still all about how he can survive.

And yet despite this very self centered kid being all about himself, we have this grace that runs unstoppable.

This story is unbelievable.

So the son comes home and the father's reaction says it all.

While the boy was still a long way off, his father sees him...

What does that mean?

He was scanning the horizon, looking for him...waiting, hoping...praying

And when he sees his son, he is filled with compassion and he runs to his son and throws his arms around him and kisses him.

An elder in the village, a respected father, would never ever in a million years do this – run

He has been shamed in front of the whole village, by his son's behavior.

He would never initiate and go to the son.

He would never pick up his skirts, if you will, and start running.

Very undignified for an older man to run in those days...

And when he gets there he literally drapes (that's the meaning) his arms around his son's neck and kisses him.

The boy has shamed the whole village and if the villagers get there before the father does, they will kill him.

And the role of the father who has been shamed is to kill him. That was the honor code back then but he doesn't do it.

He throws his arms around the boy and the boy tells him his plan of being the father's slave.

But the dad says stop, (he actually interrupts him) you made your decisions before and they didn't work,

Now this is my call.

Bring the sandals and put them on his feet to show that he is not a slave.

Bring the robe to show that he is part of us – and looks like us

And bring the signet ring, the one that back in the day when they created contracts they rolled the signet ring in wax and **it carries all the authority of the family, put it on him.**

The boy tried to say Dad you don't understand.

And the dad said no you don't understand.

What you don't understand is my heart.

What you don't understand is what it means to me to have you home.

I thought about you every day! And here you are and I'm so glad! We are going to celebrate.

This is how it is going to work. You went on your terms, but you come back on mine.

So they bring the sandals and the ring and the robe and killed the fatted calf. **The fatted calf was a sacred thing.**

It was saved for special days like the Day of Atonement. Well that's what this is.

This is the Day of Atonement.

This is real repentance.

The son has come from destitution to complete restoration.

Because of the father!

This is what God's grace does. It is amazing!

The elder son has been laboring out in the field and he missed all the action.

He comes home and hears music and he asks a servant what is going on and the servant told him his brother was home and they were having a party.

And the elder brother is ticked!

Everybody else was having a great time and he is so angry he wont go in to the party

The brother who had been on the outside is now on the inside and the guy on the inside is now on the outside.

And the father's compassion comes forward again.

He goes out to the older brother (it was very un-hospitable for the host of a party to leave the party by the way) and tries to calm the older son down, down but he doesn't want to be calmed down.

All these years I worked for YOU! And you never gave ME a CALF that I might make merry with MY friends. It's not fair...

But when this son of yours – not my brother but “this son of yours” – disowning his own brother comes home, you kill the fatted calf for him!!

The older brother's problem is his self-absorbed emphasis. There is no joy in him.

The father says, “We have to celebrate and be glad because this brother of yours (tries to reconcile the son with his brother) was dead and now he is alive again. He was lost and now is found”.

Make no doubt about it: **The party is the celebration of the success of the father, for restoring his boy.**

And we don't know the end of the story do we?

Will the older brother go in and celebrate?

Or will he stay outside and stew in his juices?

Some people have asked, “what would have happened if the younger son had met the older brother first, before he met the father?”

He would have never made it home.

It is unbelievable, the juxtaposition of unimaginable selfishness and unstoppable grace.

Here we have a table set before us that symbolizes the same thing.

Unimaginable selfishness on our part, and unstoppable grace on God's part.

Jesus was betrayed for 30 pieces of silver

He was falsely accused

He was beaten and shamed and made to carry his own cross until he fell over in exhaustion...

Because the religious leaders were too self absorbed to receive his joy-filled message

About a God who had unstoppable prodigal love for a world of selfish people.

Jesus shed his blood and allowed his body to be broken so we could be reconciled to God. Restored as his beloved children.

And here we are...

About ready to take these elements...which for us is God's party saying "you are mine...you are forgiven...you are free..."

Take eat Do life on my terms...be reconciled to me and come home again

You who are lost today, be found in Jesus' name...

God is searching the horizon waiting for you

God wants to welcome you and embrace you today

He wants to forgive the burden of your sin,

He died for it. He gave his life for it.

All we need do is receive his grace and pray... Come into my heart Lord Jesus.

Friends, these elements are truly the gifts of God for you, the people of God...

Let's be reconciled to him...Let us pray...AMEN