

Willow River Parish: Clear Lake, Deer Park, and Faith Family**Title: Two Prodigal Sons****Lesson: Luke 15:1-3, 11-32 NRSV**

15 Now all the tax collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to him. 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:

¹¹ Then Jesus said, "There was a man who had two sons. ¹² The younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of the property that will belong to me.' So he divided his property between them. ¹³ A few days later the younger son gathered all he had and traveled to a distant country, and there he squandered his property in dissolute living. ¹⁴ When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that country, and he began to be in need. ¹⁵ So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs. ¹⁶ He would gladly have filled himself with the pods that the pigs were eating; and no one gave him anything. ¹⁷ But when he came to himself 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 when 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 property 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.'"

(Slide 1) Jesus always welcomed sinners and tax collectors unlike the Pharisees and the scribes. Jesus ate with sinners and taught them, but the Pharisees and the scribes didn't like sinners and didn't understand Jesus' action. Then Jesus told a parable to teach everyone there, including the sinners, the tax collectors, the Pharisees, and the scribes.

(Slide 2) Let's look at that painting. The title of that painting is 'The Prodigal Son' by Rembrandt, a Dutch painter. In that painting, there is a man kneeling in shabby clothes. He is the younger son who had left his father and returned. And, the man in the red cape hugging him is the younger son's father. And, the man standing next to the father in a red cape with a cane is the older brother of the returned man.

In this parable, there are three people: the younger son, the father, and the older son. We will take a look at this parable by focusing on each perspective of them.

(Slide 3) First, we will see the perspective of the younger son. One day, the second son said to his father: "Father, give me the share of the property that will belong to me." (12) At that time, it was their custom that children received the inheritance after the death of their parents. Therefore, asking about the share of the property was very a rude request because his father wasn't dead. However, his father's reaction was more interesting. If the father followed the custom of the time, he would have scolded his son, but the father in the parable accepted his son's request and gave inheritance to his first and second sons.

By the way, the more surprising thing was that the second son decided to travel to a distant country after gathering all he had. At that time, it was not very common to live away from home because most people lived where they were born until they died. And hometown also meant a person's identity. Living away from home and his father was morally wrong at the time. But, the younger son left his father and his hometown to live far away and cut off all contact with his family. The younger son was probably confident that he would be able to live without his father because he received a lot of property. Therefore, he arrived where he would live and began to waste his money.

(Slide 4) However, life was not easy for him. He had hardly any money left as he had wasted his money. To make things worse, a severe famine came to his country. So he couldn't even get any help from the people around him. Eventually, he went to the least financially stable person in the country for help. Then his boss sent him out into the fields to feed the pigs.

The meaning of that the younger son was sent to the fields to feed the pigs was that his circumstances were very poor and difficult. Koreans tend to like pigs. And the pig is known in Korea as a symbol of bringing wealth. So, if pigs appear in Koreans' dream, they would go to the market and buy lottery tickets. However, Jews at that time did not eat pork and despised pigs. Only the socially and financially poor took the work feeding pigs.

The younger son fed the pigs, but he had nothing to eat and no one helped him. Only then he began to reflect on his life and felt regret about his mistakes and repented. He thought he had to get back to his father somehow and practiced what he would say when he would meet his father, saying, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands." (18b-19)

(Slide 5) Now, it's the father's perspective. The father loved both his sons. One day, his second son came to him and asked for an inheritance. He knew his son's request was an unreasonable and rude request, but he loved his son so much. Therefore, he gave the share of the property to his two sons. However, his second son decided to leave his hometown. The father didn't want the second son to leave, but he respected his plan. From the day the son left, the father began to worry about his younger son. The father couldn't sleep well at night, he couldn't eat well, and he missed and thought of his second son all day. Years later, when the father was still anxiously waiting for his second son to return in front of the house, from afar, a man who looked like his second son came into his sight. The man's clothes were old and torn, but his father was sure that the man was his second son.

(Slide 6) The father ran and hugged and kissed his son. The son asked forgiveness to his father, as he practiced. Before the second son finished speaking, his father said to his servants: "Quickly, bring out a robe—the best one—and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet." (22) And, the father called him as beloved son. And even then, he killed a fatted calf and gave a banquet and invited everyone in the village.

(Slide 7) Finally, it is the perspective of the first son. At that time, the first son was important. Usually, the eldest son inherited most of the property after father's death. So the first son thought that his father's property would be his. By the way, the second son asked his father for his inheritance before his father died. It was unwelcomed for the first son to share his father's property with the younger brother because the first son thought his father's property would be his. The first son

probably hated the second son very much. Thus, the first son may have wished that his younger brother would not return from a distant foreign country unlike his dad.

(Slide 8) One day the first son was returning home from work in the field. By the way he heard music and saw many people in the yard of his house. And when he learned that the feast was for his younger brother, who had returned, the first son felt greatly betrayed by his father. He went to his father and said: “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. But when this son of yours came back, you killed the fatted calf for him.” (29-31)

The first son called his friends ‘my friends’, but called his younger brother ‘this son of yours’. His father was happy and forgave the younger son that had returned to him, even though his second son had made many mistakes and faults. But the first son didn’t welcome his brother and hated him.

(Slide 9) I believe the essence of Christian faith is to love enemies and forgive enemies through the love of Christ. In this parable, the father forgave his son, even though his second son made mistakes. However, the first son did not understand his father's forgiveness and love at all and rather hated his younger brother.

Beloved: two sons appeared in this parable. The second son made mistakes, but he realized his sins and sincerely repented. We call him the prodigal son. Although the first son served his father, he did not understand his father's love and forgiveness. Therefore, not only the second son was the prodigal son, but the first son was also the prodigal son.

Jesus always explained about the kingdom of God that is totally different from our common sense and customs by using parables. Over the past week, I have been told confusing news from media that North Korea has developed a new ICBM and Russia is threatening Ukraine with nuclear weapons. I feel that it seems that the world follows the logic of power that the strong wins and rules the weak. However, God's way is totally different from ours. God loves the weak, He loves the poor, and He loves the socially marginalized and the minorities.

In fact, we were all prodigal children. We were all sinners, but God made us His children through Jesus Christ. During this special season of Lent, I pray that we will remember that we are children of God, and stay in Christ forgiving and loving others. Amen.