

St. Luke Ev. Lutheran Church

Sermon by Pastor A. E. Schultz
March 10, 2013 Lent 4—
Series C
Luke 15:1-3 and 11-24



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

²But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them." ³Then Jesus told them this parable:

¹¹... "There was a man who had two sons. ¹²The younger one said to his father, 'Father, give me my share of the estate.' So he divided his property between them. ¹³Not 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. ¹⁴After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. ¹⁵So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. ¹⁶He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything. ¹⁷When 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! ¹⁸I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. ¹⁹I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired men.' ²⁰So 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. ²³Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. ²⁴For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' So they began to celebrate.

People of God – rescued from the flaming lake of fire in hell by the innocent blood of the very Lamb of God:

Forgiveness! Not an easy concept! I read this week about a man with Bible names. His first name is Aaron – like Moses’ brother Aaron. His last name is Thomas – like the disciple that reached out his hand and touched Jesus’ hand and reached out his hand – and touched the spear wound in Jesus’ side. Aaron Thomas is guilty of unspeakable crimes – again and again and again. In court Aaron said he is “totally blameworthy”. He is responsible and he is without excuse. Aaron has been sentenced to three life sentences plus 80 years – so far. He is guilty of even more unspeakable attacks. What does that mean – three life sentences? Who knows? Depending – apparently on what state you are in – it can be as many as 20 years or as few as 8 or even 5? Can that be right? A Governor or the President can give you a pardon – and you go free right now! If you were one of Aaron’s victims – would you forgive him? Could you forgive him? Two of his victims – have already said, “I forgive him and I am praying for him – that somehow he could be cured of whatever sickness has caused him to do such horrible and hurtful evil!” Forgiveness! If Aaron was your son – would you forgive him – no matter what? That’s what a parent does. We forgive because of the unconditional love we have for our children. So it is with our Heavenly Father – he forgives us. Today – the 4th Sunday of Lent we consider the familiar parable of the wasteful and lost son and remember:

Our Father Always Forgives Us

1. We have sinned against our Heavenly Father
2. We can always come home!

¹Now the tax collectors and "sinners" were all gathering around to hear him. Tax collectors – not a popular bunch even 2,000 years ago. Tax collectors collected taxes for the hated Roman Government. They collected taxes that paid for the Roman soldiers that occupied Israel. Some Roman soldiers came by John the Baptist – and asked about fruits of faith – appropriate for their role and responsibilities. Remember what John said? **“Don’t extort money and don’t accuse people falsely – be content with your pay.”** And the Tax Collectors. John told them point blank, **“Don’t collect any more than you are required to.”** Most tax collectors did collect more than they were required and put the extra in their own pockets. That

was just wrong! Tax collectors and “sinners” were gathering around Jesus. “Sinners” – here in the Greek – to miss the mark! This is fundamental – to make an error – a mistake – to do the wrong thing! There are in Greek and English all sorts of words for sin. Iniquities – to fail to measure up! If you watch cooking shows – you know all about what happens when you make a mistake with the recipe – not enough of one ingredient – to fail to put in enough – and the whole plate is ruined. There are transgressions – to cross a line – to go too far. Little children and young people are constantly learning about this concept – inappropriate! I heard about a little girl playing house – telling one of her toys – “Now that’s inappropriate!” That’s pretty good! There are trespasses – going where you are not supposed to go – with your hands – with your feet – with your eyes – with your thoughts! There are all kinds of sins – all kinds of sinners. These were the people that “good people” looked down on. The kind of people where so called good people would say, “I’m not perfect – no one is! But at least I’m better than that guy!” And that’s just wrong. To think that way in your ♥ is a sin! Tax collectors and sinners – the people who were spiritually sick and knew it. People who needed the great Physician of souls – and knew it – were the people Jesus spent time with. He was not ashamed of them.

To illustrate this point Jesus told the familiar parable of the Lost Son.¹¹... **"There was a man who had two sons. ¹²The younger one said to his father, 'Father, give me my share of the estate.' So he divided his property between them."** **Inheritance** – what you receive from your parents when they die – because they love you! Sometimes it isn’t very much! Visit people who spend their final years in a nursing home – and their “estate” consists of not too much! There is a beautiful quilt that keeps them warm in the night. There are a few sets of clothes on hangers in the closet – some drawers full of socks and t-shirts and handkerchiefs and stuff. A tv that is narrow enough to fit on the dresser. A recliner – where they fall asleep sitting up – watching TV. There is a sign that says, “Family does laundry”. There is a bulletin board filled with birthday cards and pictures of grandchildren and great-grandchildren and some plastic flowers in an old vase – and that’s about it! Sometimes an estate is pretty valuable – hundreds of thousands of dollars worth of gold and silver coins, stocks and bonds, bearer bonds – antique furniture – collections of fine art – china, silver, rare collectables of all kinds – worth hundreds of thousands of dollars more! The only problem – the person who owns all

those “things and stuff” doesn’t die! They hoard their stuff – or little by little they sell it off or give it away and little by little – this estate that someone is burning yearning to get their greedy little hands on – is shrinking – slowly but surely shrinking! What to do? What to do? Imagine the little grandma with the substantial estate – and she doesn’t go to heaven – until finally – finally one day she takes a terrible tumble down the steps – breaks her neck and dies! What a terrible accident – were it not for the terrible dent in the dry-wall at the top of the steps – where her head was cracked – before that unfortunate tumble down the stairs.

Inheritance – estate – that you are supposed to inherit – when someone dies – that they leave you because they love you! In Jesus’ teaching story the younger son wants his inheritance – but he wants it now. A few have suggested this was sometimes done – because the industrious son wants his sheep and goats and camels to build the herd. Almost everyone suggests this was greed – plain and simple – rude and wrong! Give me my share of the estate. I would like it now – please! The Father gives the younger son what he wants!

¹³Not 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.

Off for a distant country. First the younger son removed his ♥ from his family and then he removed his body. Off to a distant country – it wasn’t enough to move out of the house or the town or the county or the state. He moved to a distant country. There would be no bumping into people from church at the Piggly Wiggly or at McDonalds or Ace! There would be no elder dropping off sermons and the latest Meditations and a little note inviting him to come to Church! There would be no birthday parties or weddings or anniversaries where grandparents and aunts and uncles would ask about his faith. It’s the ever popular what happens in Vegas stays in Vegas – provided Vegas is a thousand miles away! The disciple Jesus loved – warns against loving the things and stuff of this world too much. John wrote, **“Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them. For everything in the world – the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life – comes not from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but whoever does the will of God lives forever.”** 1 John 2:15-17 Love “things and stuff” and they become your god – small “g”.

¹⁴After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. ¹⁵So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. ¹⁶He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything. Taking care of pigs – not a sweet job! When we came to Trinity in Dundee – the first hospital call I made was to a grandpa who was loading hogs onto a truck to turn them into bacon and hams. One of the pigs decided he didn't want to be bacon yet, so he turned around and stuck his hoof into the grandpa's shin and tore it open! Pigs! One morning on the radio they said – call in if you had a terrible summer job when you were growing up. One person called and said – the worst job ever was cleaning up after pigs. Someone else called in and said cleaning up after chickens was even worse. The third person called in to say one summer they cleaned up after pigs in the morning and cleaned up after chickens in the afternoon and said they were both horrible! For someone familiar with Old Testament ceremonial law – there are few things more degrading in every way – that taking care of pigs! The younger son had quit literally hit bottom! Sometimes that's what it takes! There were drug addicts in downtown Lima, Peru – who woke up literally in the gutter – having literally sold themselves for money to buy more drugs. Drug addicts who woke up literally filthy – having lost their spouse, lost their job, lost their children, lost all their friends, lost all self-respect. They woke up literally covered with filth on the outside – and filthy on the inside – filthy in their ♥ and in their soul. Sometimes we have to lose everything – before we realize we are spiritually homeless – spiritually street people – in desperate need of the forgiveness only Jesus can give!

¹⁷When 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! ¹⁸I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. ¹⁹I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired men.' ²⁰So he got up and went to his father. The runaway son – the wasteful son – the lost son realized he had sinned. He would go back to his father and confess – he had sinned against his heavenly Father and against his earthly father. He rightly understood – when we sin – we sin first against the LORD. We break the 1st commandment when we sin against God – and in the process break the 4

commandment – sinning against our parents. We don't deserve our Father's love. This was not some plea bargain – to plead guilty in exchange for a lighter sentence. **I am no longer worthy to be called your son – make me like one of your hired workers!** A simple powerful honest confession. This is what the son would do.

"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...** How the father must have longed for the day his son would come back! How he loved his son. While the son was still a long way away his dad saw him and his ♥ was filled with compassion – a father's heart that felt the heartache of his son. The father didn't wait for his son – he ran to meet him – threw his arms around him and kissed him.

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. ²³Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. ²⁴For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.'** So they began to celebrate. **The best robe, the ring, the sandals, the fattened calf** – all tangible evidence of the Father's love for his lost son. The love and forgiveness in the Father's ♥ overflowed. His son was as good as dead – and now he is alive. They had to celebrate! They had to! Imagine living a thousand miles from here. Your whole life your family grew up coming to Church, learning God's Word, serving Jesus in every way possible. And yet – still – somehow one of your children has a ♥ that is cold and hard. You love them and forgive them and pray for them. And then – one day they are gone. They run away – way up north – to join a godless cult – that has as its mission to live and do and say and think everything that is contrary to the Gospel. How would that go? You have looked and looked but physically you cannot find your child. You pray for them morning, noon and night. When the phone rings – especially in the dark – late at night – you are painfully afraid it's going to be the police or the sheriff – saying they have discovered your child's body – and you need to fly up here and identify it – and take it home with you. Could you imagine living like that? Children or grandchildren – a brother or a sister – could run away – leave in the night – so you cannot find them. And still – and still you love them. You pray desperately that they would know – you can

always come home. No matter what we have done – no matter what we have become – no matter how far we have wandered – no matter what unspeakable evil we have done in our life or in our ♥ – we can always come home. Because Jesus' forgiving love never fails. We can always come home for Jesus' sake. Amen!

To God alone all glory!

Pastor Anthony E. Schultz