

**Preaching Christ....
...by the power of the Holy Spirit
...and the authority of the Word of God**

Date: 13 March 2022
Services: *Across the diocese*
Series: Parables
Reading: Luke 15:1-2; 11-24
Title: Lost son # 1

Reading

15 Now the tax collectors and sinners were all gathering around to hear Jesus. ² But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them."

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 servants 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 servants.' 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.

- Two things we don't quite get head our heads around when it comes to Jesus' ministry on earth...
- How **popular** he was
- How **hated** he was
- From the moment he began his public ministry – thousands **flocked to hear him** – travelling long distances... why? To hear him **TEACH!**
- They'd never heard anything like it!!
- He taught with **authority**
- **Clarity**

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- **Wisdom**
- **insight**
- in the initial stages it was his **teaching** which drew people to him... sometimes going days **without food** just so they could keep listening...!
- And yet right from the **start?** – well even the announcement of his **birth** was such a threat to King Herod he had all young boys in the region killed.... **Extreme!**
- And as soon as he opened his mouth to start **teaching**, he was so **reviled** that some wanted to **kill him...**
- Even in the little town of Nazareth in which he'd grown **up** – they wanted to throw him off a **cliff... //**
- ...and what we need to be **clear** about is the unlikely candidates for those who **loved** him and **hung on every word** on the **one hand** – and those who were **offended** and **upset** by every word...on the **other /**
- So you could be **forgiven** for thinking that when the long awaited **Messiah** that the whole Old Testament had **promised** and **people** had been **longing and waiting** for turned up / then the religious people would welcome him with open arms! //
- **AND** you could also be **forgiven** for **assuming** that **notorious sinners** – such as **tax collectors and prostitutes and the like** – would want to **distance** themselves from **Jesus...** that **they'd** be the ones wanting to **get rid of him...** //
- But – no – turn **both** those assumptions on their **head!!**
- The sinners **loved him**
- And the **religious** – **hated him...**
- Now – right now you may be asking – hang on Mark – aren't we doing the **Prodigal Son** today?
- **What is he going on about?**
- ...ha... good **question...** /
- ...but what I've told you **so far** is the **necessary background** for understanding this **great, moving, beautiful story** Jesus told...
- So here's where we're going today – very briefly -
 1. **The issue**
 2. **The sinner**
 3. **The Father**

1. **THE ISSUE**

- The **issue** this story addresses – which we **mustn't** miss - is in fact made clear in vv1-2 of ch 15 – and Kevin pointed this out last week in his sermon on the lost sheep and coin – but will you have a look at them again with me? – *Now the tax collectors and sinners were all gathering around to hear Jesus. But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them."*
- There it is you see – the **tax collectors** – where corruption was a way of life – and '**sinners**' – of all sorts – were gathering around to **hear** Jesus... **lapping up** his every **word...** couldn't get **enough //** and the religious people – the **Pharisees** and **teachers of the law** stood there **watching** on and **muttering...** "this man welcomes sinners **AND** eats with them!!"
- You see their **rules** and their **traditions**, mattered **more** to them than **people...**

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- ...and because of that / they had missed the **whole mission heart** of **God** – which had **always** been to welcome **sinners** – to call **sinners** – back to **him**...
- When **THEY** saw the **sinners** – they didn't see people of **value** to **God**... / they only thought of their **rules** being **broken**... //
- And when they heard Jesus **speak** – they didn't hear **anything** he **said** – they only saw him breaking their rules because he ate with **sinners and tax collectors** which made him **religiously unclean**.
- They saw Jesus **validating** the 'sinners'...**endorsing** them because he shared a **table** with them... In Matthew 19 – they say outright – that Jesus is a **friend of tax collectors and sinners!! ///**
- Still happens **today** doesn't it?? – the **religious** people are **blind** to those who we are meant to be **reaching** with the good news of Jesus... because of certain **religious traditions** by which we are held **captive**...
- And so the very people the church should be **reaching**... are **precluded** – **shut out** – **neglected** – because of **tradition**...>! ///
- So – **that's** the issue which gave rise to the three stories which follow those first two verses of Ch 15 – the lost **sheep** – the lost **coin** – and the lost **sons**.... **Sons** plural – because there are actually **two** lost sons in the story – both the **younger** and the **older are lost**...
- Because you see – the **younger** son represents the **SINNERS** Jesus is speaking with and the **older** son represents the **PHARISEES**... //
- Next week we'll look at the second lost son... making if you like a **fourth** point to this sermon labelled: "**Pharisee**".. //
- But for now – let's look at the **sinner**...

2. THE SINNER

- The story of course is so well known – I'm not going to retell it...
- But I do want to point out a couple of things...
- It's a **story** Jesus told... yet I've always wondered whether it was based in **reality** – did he **know** a man like this? – a **Father** like this where something similar had happened...?
- Hugely **insulting** of course to ask for a share of the estate before someone had **died**...
- He's virtually saying – I wish you were **dead**!
- I want all the '**stuff**' you have to offer – but want nothing to do with **you**...!! //
- And of course that's how most **Australians** live when it comes to God isn't it?
- Happy to have everything God has to **offer** – all the joys and **pleasures** of this life – all the **beauty of creation** – all the **joys of family and relationships** – all the opportunities of **work**... etc...
- ...but want **nothing** to do with God **himself**... //
- All the **goodies**; no **relationship**.
- The **Father** in Jesus' story **agrees** to the request – this would have been seen as **extraordinary!**
- ...and the son heads **off**... / ...and does what **many** Australians do when they first break free of their **parents** and find some **freedom**...
- And of course you know what happens with **Australians** in this situation – they eventually **text** home for more **money**!! //

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- This guy runs **out!**
- He's had no **investment** advice... he hasn't spoken to his **accountant**... he's had no one to **mentor** him in financial **planning**... and he's **blown** the **lot!**
- He has very **few options**...
- **SO** few that he takes a job feeding **pigs**... which he would have found highly **objectionable on religious grounds**....
- And even the **food** of the **pigs** looks attractive! //
- ...he's at an **all-time low**
- And what happens in **v17**?
- He **came** to his **senses**
- He suddenly sees **reality**...
- The reality that he's now worse off than his father's **servants**... /
- ...so he'll go home and ask whether he can become **one** of **them**... /
- ...in **contrition** – with **regret** – he realises and plans to say to his father – look – I'm no longer worthy to be called your **son**.... Appoint me as a **servant**... //
- ...and so he goes home... ////
- Do you see what Jesus is hereby **saying** to the **Pharisees**... and the other **religious leaders**...??
- "... **YOU** see these people as **sinners** and **tax collectors**... but they are here **listening** to me – because like the **younger son** – they have come to their **senses**...
- "They're turning their life **around** and going back to **God**... and that's a **marvellous** and **wonderful** thing...!
- can't you **see** that **Pharisee**?
- Can't you **rejoice** in that?
- Don't you see that as **brilliant**...? //
- isn't this meant to be what we're on **about**??? /////
- There may be **some** here this morning like the **Pharisee**.
- Perhaps you're **upset** about the way the church seems to be heading... modern ways... dispensing with certain traditions... //
- But friends.... we want to **reach** the **non-religious people** who **AREN'T** here – **not** **satisfy** the religious who **ARE!** /
- That's what we're **called** to **do**!! /////
- But there's something **else** I need to say too...
- There may be **another** group watching today – and you've begun to realise **YOU'VE** wanted everything **God** has to offer **except** him... /
- ...and you realise **it's** not working...
- Maybe you're coming to your **senses**! Reality is setting in
- And if that is the case for you – I want to urge you to do what **this** young man did...

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- **Decide to return...**
- **Return to God...**
- Admit your **unworthiness** to receive **anything** from him... your **sorrow** for **having walked away...**
- And **return... /////**
- Well – we’ve looked at the **issue**, we’ve looked at the **sinner...** and finally:

3. THE FATHER

- Oh friends – did you note the **yearning** of the Father – he must have been out **looking for his son....longing** for him to come **home...**
- Did you see the **compassion** he had...?
- Did you notice him **running?** / – no man ran in the 1st century – it was considered **undignified...**
- Did you notice the **embrace** – the **hug** – the **kiss** when they finally **met...?** /
- Did you notice that the son didn’t get to finish his rehearsed speech – didn’t get to ask about becoming a **servant** – only about acknowledging he was **unworthy** to be called **son?**
- And did you notice the **party** the dad threw...??
- For this - his **long lost son** who had **returned** home!
- There’s no **scolding...** no **remonstrating** for bad **behaviour** – only **welcome...!**
- He’s going to be **dressed...** he’s going to have the family **ring** on this finger, **sandals** on his **feet....** And the food – the **best food** laid on.... //
- v24 – have a look – *For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’ So they began to celebrate.* //
- What an absolutely **stunning** picture of our **great God...!**
- Are **you** that person I was speaking about just now?
- ... realising that life without God is not all it’s **cracked up to be?**
- Your running out of your own **resources** – trying to do life without **him?**
- ...you’ve been **considering** coming home to him...?
- You’ve got a few lines rehearsed you think you should probably say...?
- But you’re wondering what he’ll **say** when you **come...** how he will **react... //**
- **THIS** is how he’ll react!!
- He’ll **see** you at a **distance...**
- ...and then he’ll come **running...**
- And when he **meets** you, he’ll **welcome** you, **embrace** you, **kiss** you.... **Dress** you... and throw you a **party!**
- ...and you won’t even be able to get your lines **out!! ///**
- So I want to say to you today – **come...** come – **just as you are...**
- ...**today’s** the day to come to your **senses**, turn your life **around** and come **home...! /**

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- And when you do... tell **someone at church** – one of the ministers if you have one – or lay leaders – or contact **me...** – or some **other** trusted Christian person...
- So we can **all party with you... celebrating** your return...
- And then help you **grow** and **flourish** in your re-established relationship with God. *////*
- But to the many here who are **already** in relationship with God...
- ...I want you to see **again** today the **Father's beautiful love for you...**
- ...you may not have a dramatic '**turn your life** around' story to **tell...**
- But this is **still** his **love** for you...!
- I don't know why we end up **forgetting** or **skewing** God's love for us...
- We often see him as a **stern task master** waiting to **trip us up**
- ...or as **distant** and **sombre**
- Or as **cheesed off** with us most of the time for something... *//*
- I think we need to **recalibrate** our understanding – our appreciation – of the **Father's** love.. *//*
- Its **generous and warm and welcoming**
- He's full of **yearning for us and compassion**
- He wants to **embrace** us and **shower** us with his **gifts**
- He's ready to **forgive...** and to **reconcile** us to **himself...**
- And because we know that he **himself** has **dealt** with our sin through the **death and resurrection of His Son...**
- ...we can be **sure** that we **matter** to him...
- Sure that he's **utterly** for us...
- Sure that we can **trust** him even when we don't **understand** everything... *//*
- This is his love for **you** today...
- **Revel** in it...
- Be **sure** and **certain** in it...
- **Run** to him **today** – and he'll come **running to you...! ///**

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- Our diocese has been going now for over 150 years...
 - And this is the beautiful news – of the deep warm generous welcoming love of God – we have to share...!
 - And because **people** matter more than our **traditions** – we'll **respect** our traditions – but we'll sit **lightly** with them... because we don't want to be those religious people who sit around **muttering** at **others** because people **don't match up...**
 - We want to do **all we can** to **extend** God's love to them – to **show** them the **Father's love** *//* and to **embrace** them with the **Father's embrace...** *//*
 - ... all we can to show people the true nature of God's love for us all...
 - So we might see **more and more people** – come to their **senses** and coming **running home** to the **Father...** **!!**