

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

**Date:** 20 March 2022  
**Services:** *Across the diocese*  
**Series:** Parables of grace  
**Passage:** Luke 15:1-2 and 25-32  
**Title:** Lost son #2  
**Outline:**

**Luke 15:1-2, 25-32**

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

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**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.'"

- You wouldn't think **kindness** would be a **radical** thing would you?
- But **kindness** can get you into trouble
- **Prime ministers** get into trouble for being **kind**
- **Kevin Rudd** used to help out from time to time in a soup kitchen in Melbourne feeding the homeless... attracted criticism about his use of time...
- ... **Tony Abbott** helped out on surf patrol and in the Rural Fire service – copped criticism – only doing it for the media attention...
- Just in the last couple of weeks, **Scott Morrison** has been in trouble for visiting flood victims... who were apparently appreciative of his visit – but he was in trouble because he didn't allow the cameras in and because he didn't agree to meet with those who simply wanted to tear him apart.
- apparently, the **Pope** – has to sneak out of the Vatican late at night to go and help the homeless! //
- And Jesus was famous for **his** kindness.... Specifically – a more *radical* than lots of *our* kindnesses – he was famous for eating and drinking with **sinners**
- ....with people who were regarded as **anti-God**... who had broken the **rules** of God... such as **tax collectors**... people who were regarded as **greedy** and a **long way** from God.
- And this was the cause of enormous controversy in the life of Jesus... because he kept on going to people's homes who were sinners and the rule – the religious tradition - in their day was, if you had contact, *especially*

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over a meal, with a sinner, then **their** impurity would kind of **contaminate you... affect** and **infect** you.... And you kind of contracted **their impurity**... that's how religion worked...

- So this is how the religious leaders of the day saw Jesus... always eating with **sinners** and **tax collectors** and by so doing – becoming more and more **impure!**
- Eventually this controversy – this eating and drinking, befriending sinners... reaches a climax in Luke 15... where we've been exploring for the last three weeks... will you look at vv1-2 again with me...?
- *Now the tax collectors and sinners were all gathering around to hear Jesus.<sup>2</sup> But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them."*
- The leaders **muttered** – they **grumbled** – they were **angry** with Jesus for mixing with sinners and tax collectors...
- So Jesus tells three related stories – the Lost Sheep, the Lost Coin and a story of two Lost Sons – the first of these we looked at last week...
- but point in all three?
- to show that **people** matter than all the **religious rules and traditions...**
- To show that the **love** of God is being extended to all sorts of **unlikely people... unreligious** people...
- And the Pharisees and teachers of the law may well be very upset with Jesus about this... but this is actually what Jesus came to do – in fact he'll say it outright in Luke 19:10 – that he came to seek and to save the lost...
- So – he's got these religious people – totally opposed to Jesus mixing with these people because it upsets their religious tradition.... How is going to awake them – even excite and inspire them to what he is about?
- With the power of story...
- By way of **recap**... we saw last week as the story begins – that this son – like many Australians when it comes to God... wanted **everything the Father had** – but **nothing to do with the Father** – as he asked for his share of the estate before the Father was anywhere near death...
- and when he had spent all his money in wild living... returns home to offer himself to his father as a hired servant...
- But the Father runs to **welcome** him – throws his arms around him – dresses him – has a party with the choicest of food prepared and celebrates because this son who was lost is now found – the son who was dead is alive...

And we saw last week – that **this is the Father's love for us all....**

- ... for those who come to their **senses** - who have realised that life without God is not all is cracked up to be... and want to return to God – turning their life around – like the sinners and tax collectors – they won't find **judgment** and a **stern reprimand** for being **naughty** – they'll find a **welcoming, loving, forgiving embrace...** and **party thrown to welcome them back!**
- Jesus is saying to the **religious people** – like the lost son these sinners are coming to their **senses** – they've **returned** to the Father... they are being **received and welcomed** and forgiven by **HIM** – but not by **YOU!! //**
- Well is that **enough?**
- Is that enough to show these stern – arms folded – grumpy religious types how brilliant is God's love....?
- Probably not //
- So he wants in the **second** part of the story – to give them some insight in their position...
- he wants to wake the Pharisee and other religious leaders up – and say – guys – you're grumpy because I'm friendly with sinners... but your religious rules are blinding you to the needs of these people – and robbing you

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- of the joy of sharing the Father's love with them and seeing them return... ///
- so if the first lost son in this story represents the sinners who are coming back to Jesus...
  - ...the second lost son represents the Pharisees... because Jesus wants to give them some insight into the great tragic sadness of their understanding of how they relate to God...
  - They were lost too.... ////
  - So – the older son... let's have a look...
  - So the party for the younger son who has returned is arranged... and the older son who had been out in the field returns home from a hard day's work and hears the music and the commotion and asks one of the servants what is going on – vv25-26
  - The explanation comes in v27 – have a look – 'Your brother had come', he replied, 'and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound'.
  - Now – you'd think he'd be relieved his brother was back... and want to rush in to see him...
  - But – no – religion robs you of that kind of joy – as far as the older brother was concerned – the younger brother had broken all rules – while he had kept them – so he has no time for his brother and certainly wants nothing to do with the party...
  - V28 – *the older brother became angry and refused to go in*
  - Terrible.... Isn't it??
  - Sad...
  - You know religious people like this today??
  - Like people who say they want younger people in church – but when they come and a child makes a noise – the parents just get a cold stare...
  - or the musician at an old church of mine who when we tried to introduce any modern music to reach younger people – played it in a way that was unsingable as a protest....
  - Or the churchwarden who didn't want young people in the hall because a couple of windows had been broken... //
  - Anyway - the poor father – v28 again – went out and pleaded with his oldest son to come in and party – but he wouldn't have a bar of any of it...
  - Have a look – vv29 – 30 - *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.<sup>30</sup> But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!'*
  - I want you to notice that by his own confession, the oldest son has adopted an attitude toward the father, not as his **son**, but as if he were his **slave**....
  - ...v29 – "all these years I've been slaving for you"
  - This is Jesus' picture of **religion**
  - Jesus is saying that religion can make you feel like a **slave** to God – not as a **child** to a **beautiful parent**.
  - Religion can **lock** you up in **rules**.
  - Can I say - if you're just working away at being nice and religious because you're like this oldest son and thinking – I'm just going to slave for God and hopefully I'll **do** enough to win him over – you'll actually be turned into a **slave**... religion will crush you, and you'll have a completely stunted view of God's kindness...

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- ..which is what the oldest son had said – “You never even gave me a goat!!” he says...
  - Now - don't feel sorry for him – the father said – “you are always with me and everything I have is yours...”
  - ...in other words – you could have had the goat and the fattened calf – even the sandals if you want – but you couldn't see it because you were so locked up in your **rules!!** ///
  - Everything I have is yours... // but he couldn't see that
  - We HAD to celebrate – but he couldn't see that either
  - The apostle Paul writes in Gal 4 - <sup>7</sup>*So you are no longer a slave, but God's child; and since you are his child, God has made you also an heir.*
  - We're not slaves to rules and regulations – trying to earn God's favour by our religious strivings and hard work – we are God's precious children...
  - Religion doesn't see that... religious people ARE striving... striving... even for a tit bit from God – earning their way... paying their dues... fulfilling their obligations... thinking God will somehow owe them if they do.... doing all the rituals in precisely the right way...
  - and just like Jonah – who was angry at God's grace to the Ninevites – religious people today – are blind – even angry at the grace of God for sinners...
  - ....oblivious to real nature of God's love...
  - Unmoved by the plight of those who aren't in relationship with God – because – well – they don't deserve God's love any way...
  - Sad... no – it's tragic... and it is actually stopping the church from making any progress in sharing the love of God with others... ///
  - A young man in about year 9 or 10 came up my friend the Rev'd John Dickson after a Christian talk in a high school one day and said to John – “I'm trying to work out if God is pleased with me”
  - And he had an exercise book – with columns across the page and the days of the week... and down the side – all sorts of qualities he thought God might like – kindness, patience, going to church and so on.
  - And the guy had given himself a score out of ten for each piece of behaviour for each day of the week for pages and pages....
  - And he asked John – ‘do you think this will work’?
  - John looked at his scores... they weren't great.. .and then patiently shared with the young man that God doesn't work like that... and if you **think** he works like that you are going to look at your life and **always** feel condemned because you'll never measure up!
  - But the beautiful gift of Christianity is that God is like this father in the story Jesus told
  - He wants you to come to him and admit you score very **badly** in following his rules... and when you do that... he will wipe the slate clean because Jesus died on a cross for you... he himself took the punishment that you deserved.
  - John explained this to him and he got so excited that he took his exercise book and dramatically threw it in the bin!!!
  - He was now truly free to live the Christian life – because he'd received God's kindness...
  - Jesus describes God as a running, forgiving, embracing parent and Jesus exposed religion as something that will mess up your life... until you find the freedom Jesus came to offer. ///
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- I wonder again today whether there are some among us here who have realised maybe for the first time that

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you have lived life wanting all God has to offer, but ignoring him – even running away from him?

- I want to urge you, like the younger son in Jesus' story, to come to your senses.
- Stop pushing God out. Stop your excuses.
- Come running to God... - and he will come running to you – with arms open, willing to embrace and welcome and forgive you and shower you with all sorts of unexpected and undeserved gifts! Will you do that??
- But I also want to urge you if you've been the religious type all your life – and you've been slaving away doing stuff for God just hoping you will have done enough to earn his favour... and grumpy at those outside the church who frankly don't deserve God's love... I want to urge you too... to realise the flaws in your approach... to realise you'll never do enough... and put a stop to thinking you can... and come rest... rest in what Jesus has already done... because through his death and resurrection... he has already done all that was required... and allow your heart to be captured by the great love of God for you... but not only his love for you – his love for the sinner and the tax collector...
- And when you do that – not only will you be released for the bonds of your religion – you'll long to see more and more so-called 'sinners and tax collectors' – hear of and respond to the warm, generous, forgiving nature of God's love for them... and you'll join many of us in wanting to do all we can to see more and more people come to their senses and return to God.