



## MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

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March 14, 2010  
4<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Lent  
[Luke 15:1-3, 11b-32](#)  
Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: [Judges 10:6-16](#)  
Psalm of the Day: [115](#)  
Second Lesson: [James 4:7-10](#)  
Gospel Lesson: [Luke 15:1-3, 11b-32](#)

### **A Father's Love**

1. For The Son Who Ran
2. For The Son Who Stayed

I had a wedding here yesterday. What do you always hear at weddings? In some way, shape or form, we always seem to get back to [1 Corinthians 13](#), don't we? Love is patient. Love is kind. It keeps no record of wrongs...all those things. We didn't have that as one of the readings yesterday, but it was in the hymn that we sang. There was a paraphrase of that. It's perfectly fitting to have in a wedding. But if you want to know what love is and what that looks like, to be patient and kind and keeping no record of wrongs, the parable that Jesus told that I just read to you tells you, doesn't it? We sometimes will have different ideas of what love is or what love should be or what love should do, but here God tells us, "Here is what your Heavenly Father's love looks like."

Here is a setting that the people of Jesus' day, and I think one that we, can relate to...a son that is gone and lost to you and you don't know what's going on and him coming back and that kind of love. Here's something else that we all can probably relate to...a son that has worked hard and thinks he deserves more from his father and is really put out with jealousy when his father shows love to someone else. It could hit us all right where we live because in a very real way, each one of us here today is that first son. That first son, who demands his inheritance of his father and thinks he knows better than what his father does, his father gives it to him. He divides the inheritance. The older son normally would have kept the home place and the majority of the estate, but the younger son would have had an inheritance. But he didn't want to wait for his dad to kick the bucket. He wanted it then and there. In the parable, he took it and he left. He took off and just blew it, wasted it. His older son said he squandered it on prostitutes. Whatever it was, he used it in a way that wasn't all that bright. Of course, that's the nature of sin, isn't it?

Sin has never made anyone smarter. We think we know better than God. We think we understand things better than God. Very often we want to tell God how he should be running things. The exuberance and knowledge of youth that is soon shown to be folly is the same exact thing of sin. The knowledge of sin, which says this is going to be better, this is going to be more fun, often brings our worlds today crashing around on us, and we bring it upon ourselves. The son in this parable is not just a picture of the "worst of sinners" like we might like to think...the murderer, the child molester or something like that. This is every last one of us. We are all born separated from God. We, in our sinful nature, think we know better than God. We all want to tell God what to

do. Then when we go our own way, quite often it leads to nothing but heartaches and problems sometime along the road. A lot of times we bring that on ourselves because we are foolish sinners. So if we can't see ourselves in this first son, we need to get some spiritual classes, because it's us. We are this sinner.

That's why the love that the father in this parable shows; the son works up his whole speech right? The son says, "I'm going to say this. I'm going to say that. Can I just be a hired hand" and all this stuff. He doesn't get to even get that out. The father is just so overjoyed. His love for his son that had strayed is so intense that he won't let him finish. He just wants to start celebrating. In this whole chapter, Jesus tells this parable to these guys that were confident of their own righteousness, the pharisees. They were upset that Jesus was eating with "sinners." He told two parables before this. The parable of the lost coin and the parable of the lost sheep. This tells us how urgent the seeking of the lost is to God. In this one, we see how deep God's love is for the lost and how much he rejoices when they are found. It's like God tells us there is more rejoicing in heaven over a sinner that repents than over 99 who don't need to repent. There is rejoicing in heaven because God has led you and I to see our sin and to trust that only in him those sins are taken away.

So he gives us celebrations while we are in this world. He gives us his love and his promises and his assurances that he is with us. Today he gives us a feast. He gives us his very body and blood to assure us, "I love you to pieces. I love you so much that my body was broken to pieces. I love you so much, here is the blood that poured down my head and my arms and my hands and my back as the punishment for your sin. This is how much I love you." This is the feast that he gives to celebrate his love for us here today. God just can't wait to celebrate with us. Most intense in his greatest desire is that people turn from their sin and turn to him and find forgiveness in the perfect life and the innocent death of Jesus. That's where forgiveness is found. It's not found in our decision to turn away from our sin. It's not found in my repenting. It's found in Christ's life and death. That's a certainty. You and I are going to be up and down and all around and all over the place in our emotions and our feelings towards one another, let alone in our feelings towards God. So the certainty of our forgiveness resting on God's love instead of upon us, that's confidence. That's something that we can always rely on.

But this incredible perfect love of our God is not always all that well received. Sure, some turn their back on it, but some see it and give it to someone else and say, "God, you should be showing more of it to me." That's the older son in this parable, right? It's not hard to see what Jesus is saying. The younger son who ran off, that's the sinners that Jesus was continually eating with in what it said there in the beginning. He was eating, ongoing eating with them. They flocked to him. The self-righteous pharisees would never associate with these people. They were above them and looked down on them. Yet Jesus was always there. So that pictures that young son that Jesus had to celebrate with like the Heavenly Father did.

When the pharisees saw that, they were kind of like this older son, right? He hears the celebration. Comes in, kind of put out, because he is working hard and people are celebrating. You know how it is. You think, "I'm working. Everyone else should be working in the world," right? When they aren't, you get put out. You're not happy for them that they are celebrating. You are put out that you are working and they are celebrating. So he comes in and gets a little wound up about that. Then he finds out it's because "that son of yours" has come back. He doesn't even call him his brother. This is how bitter jealousy and envy makes us. This "son of yours wasted all of your money. Now he comes back, and you kill the fattened calf? I've been working my tail off for you year after year after year, and I haven't even gotten a goat. Life isn't fair."

Can you sympathize with this older brother? Do you kind of think he's got a point here? As I've told you many, many times, God isn't fair and you better thank God that he's not. If God is fair, we are all going to hell. God is completely unfair and you and I are forgiven because of it. He punished Jesus instead of punishing us. He demands perfection of you and me, but he counts Jesus' perfection as our perfection. So when we start thinking this isn't quite right, we have to recognize that we are stepping in the shoes of the pharisees and this older son.

Notice the father's love for him. He doesn't do what many human fathers would have done, including myself. He doesn't chew him out. He doesn't read him a riot act. Instead he's patient with him and reminds him that "this is your brother. He's not just my son. This is your brother. This is someone you should love." If we are ever put out that God forgives someone that all their life lived the way they wanted and then on their death bed hears about Christ and believes and is saved...if we are put out by that, then we have a problem. We are told to love as God has loved. God loves everyone. God loves those who are unlovable. He tells us to love as we have been loved, so we are supposed to love the unlovable and not say, "You should be more like me" but "I thank God that God has made you more like him and washed away your sins."

We see the end of the story with the younger son, right? He comes back. He is received. They celebrate. They rejoice. The older son; we don't hear the end of the story. It just kind of ends. We don't know if the son listened to the father and said, "Dad, you know your right. I'm being an idiot. I'm sorry." We don't know if he holds his breath and stomps off into the sunset. We don't know. We aren't told. And I think the reason is because Jesus was saying to the pharisees he was telling this parable to, "Do you guys get it? This is you. So what's the end of the story. What are you going to do? Are you going to stomp off? Are you going to recognize your sin and turn back to God and celebrate that the lost have been found and sinners are forgiven?"

This brings us to the vital question for us here today. Which son are we? Are we the one that is rejoicing that we have been found? Or are we the one pouting that God has found someone else and he hasn't just showered all his love only upon us? The fact of the matter is that quite often we are one or the other of the sons, and we shift back and forth an awful lot. The fact is, we have sinned against our God. We continue to sin against our God by thinking we know better than God, just like the older son thought he

knew better than the father. When we see that and recognize that, there is one response that is fitting. It ends with a period, not a comma. "I have sinned against you Lord. Forgive me for the sake of Christ." And once again, today we have this assurance that we are forgiven because his body and blood comes to us and the promise of God's Word gives it the power to actually forgive our sins. We who think we know better than God, we who at times hold our breath and stomp around because God isn't doing what we think he should be doing...it's an amazing truth. God loves us in spite of who we are. God loves us because he has a perfect Father's love.