

## *Fourth Sunday in Lent*

March 6, 2016

Amazing Grace Lutheran Church - Pastor Chip Wilke

Luke 15:1-3, 11-32

One night a man suffered a heart attack and asked the nurse to immediately call his daughter, the only family he had left. When the daughter heard the news, she pleaded with the nurse not to let her father die. Her and her father got into an argument almost a year earlier and the last thing she said to him was: *"I hate you."* For months she had wanted to ask for his forgiveness, but hadn't. The nurse prayed for the father to hang on while the daughter hurried to make the thirty minute trip to see her dad. When she arrived the nurse saw the doctors talking to the daughter outside the room and then witnessed the pathetic hurt in her face. She was too late. The nurse approached the daughter and the daughter cried: *"I never hated him, you know. I loved him. And now I want to go see him."* When the nurse and the man's daughter went to the bed of her deceased father they noticed a scrap of paper on the table by the bed. She picked it up and began to read: *"My dearest Jane, I forgive you. I pray you will forgive me. I know you love me. I love you, too. Daddy."*

Many people long for the love, the approval, & the forgiveness of a father. We are reminded that we have such love and forgiveness from a Father, from our true Father in heaven. His love surpasses what any earthly father could give us. Listen to Jesus teach us today and: **Rejoice in the Father's forgiving love.**

Jesus is talking here to Pharisees and teachers of the law who mutter over the fact that Jesus welcomes and eats with tax collectors and sinners. They didn't understand the reason Jesus came into this world was for sinners. So ***"Jesus told them this parable."*** Actually, He gives three parables with the same general truth: God wants to save sinners. He wants to seek and save the lost. This point is clear in the parables of the lost sheep and the lost coin. These parables also teach that God rejoices, and the angels with Him, over one sinner who repents - over one lost soul that is found.

Now, this third parable is along these same lines. This parable of the prodigal son is probably one of the most familiar ones in the Bible. The beauty of it lies in its simplicity. The facts don't need much explanation. A father has two sons, and the younger asks for his share of the inheritance, gets it, and then takes off to live how he wants to live. This son goes to a distant country and squanders his wealth in wild living. He had no need for his father. He pays for prostitutes. He wants to do what he wants to do. He wants to eat, drink, and be merry. Yet, we see that without his father, life isn't as merry as he expected it

to be. A famine hits. His money runs out. His so-called friends abandon him. He had to be hired by a citizen to work in the fields and care for the pigs. This is rock bottom -the lowest of low for a Jewish person! This son has this detestable job and his stomach is so hungry he longs to eat the share of pods that are fed to the pigs, ***“but no one gave him anything.”***

Have you ever hit rock bottom like this prodigal son? Even if we haven't I'm sure we all know the feeling of foolishly rebelling against our fathers, especially our heavenly Father. When we disobey Him, when we run away and sin, the farther we get from our Father the worse it gets. We too start to starve spiritually. When it comes to our sin and guilt apart from the Father no one can give us anything, there is no one to help us. That's why I pray like this son we never forget the Father.

The son 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! I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me one of your hired men.”*** The son realized he had sinned. He realized that without his father he is lost. He is even, as described later by the father, dead. He decides to offer himself to be his father's servant. He doesn't deserve to be called a son.

As the son heads for home we now get to the best part of the parable. The parable isn't so much about the sons as it is about what we see from this father. Do you see the awesome forgiving love of the father? The father sees his son still a long way off and is filled with compassion. This starving son can't look very good as he returns home. But his father runs out to him. Before the son can say a word, the father throws his arms around him and kisses his neck, a sign of forgiveness. The son confesses his sin, and says: ***“I am no longer worthy to be called your son.”*** But the father calls his servants to bring out the best robe and put it on his boy. He puts a ring on his hand, a true sign of sonship. He puts sandals on his feet - not something the servants would wear. He prepares the fattened calf, something that was reserved for a guest of honor and only for a rare special occasion. The father wants to celebrate for he says: ***“This son of mine was dead and is alive; he was lost and now is found.”***

Can there be any other reaction than to rejoice? Actually, there is another reaction to the father's forgiving love. The older son is in the field working when he hears the music and dancing. The servant's tell him that his brother is back, and his father has killed the fattened calf. But the older brother is angry and refuses to go in. His father comes out and pleads with him. The father wants him to join in the celebration. But the older brother points out how faithful he remained to his father. He complains that he and his friends

never received the fattened calf. How can this worthless “*son of yours,*” as the older brother calls him, get this warm welcome home? Listen again to this father reach out in forgiving love to his older son in an attempt to open his eyes. “*My son,’ the father says, ‘you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. But we have to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’*” With this parable Jesus is reaching out to the Pharisees and teachers of the law who shunned Jesus for eating with tax collectors and sinners. Very clearly they are the older brother.

With this parable Jesus is reaching out to us. He is teaching us to rejoice in Father’s forgiving love and to readily welcome a repentant brother or sister. It is so easy to begin to think that we are a little more deserving of the Father’s forgiving love than some others. I’ve even heard Christians comment about others getting what they deserved or muttering about how people like that could go to heaven. Do we ever raise our eyebrows when that person who has made many mistakes comes through our doors to receive forgiveness and a gracious reception from our Father? Do we think we are more deserving because of our faithful service? Then, we need to remember the reason Jesus came. He came to save sinners, sinners like us!

Neither one of these sons deserve their father’s forgiving love! And don’t you see yourself in both of these sons! We are the son who goes astray. We are the son who looks down on others and doesn’t always rejoice in the Father’s grace. That’s why I’m glad to say once again that this parable is really all about the Father - the Father who, in love, gave up His own Son for us - the Father who, in love, “*does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities*” (Psalm 103). We have a Father who gives us the best robe as He robes us in the righteousness of Christ. Our Father gives us true sonship in the blessing of baptism. Our Father doesn’t demand we pay the debt of our sin because He already sent Jesus to pay for it all on the cross. On the third day as Jesus rose from the dead the Father’s forgiving arms opened wide for all to come in.

So do you long for the love and approval and forgiveness of a father? Your Father tells you He loves and forgives you with more than a note beside His death bed. He tells you with a cross and empty grave. He tells He loves and He forgives you with a whole Book called His Holy Word. Your Savior tells you He loves you and He forgives you in bread and wine, which is also His body and blood. So rejoice because you were lost but now you are found. Rejoice because you were dead but now you are alive. Rejoice because Jesus sinners does receive! Rejoice and never stop rejoicing in the Father’s forgiving love. Amen.



