

**Lost—And Found**  
**Fourth Sunday in Lent**  
**March 30, 2025**

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**St. David's Episcopal Church, North**  
**Chesterfield, VA**

**G**racious Father, whose blessed Son Jesus Christ came down from heaven to be the true bread which gives life to the world: Evermore give us this bread, that he may live in us, and we in him; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *AMEN.*

*Joshua 5:9-12 (NRSV)*

The LORD said to Joshua, “Today I have rolled away from you the disgrace of Egypt.” And so that place is called Gilgal to this day. <sup>10</sup> While the Israelites were camped in Gilgal they kept the passover in the evening on the fourteenth day of the month in the plains of Jericho. <sup>11</sup> On the day after the passover, on that very day, they ate the produce of the land, unleavened cakes and parched grain. <sup>12</sup> The manna ceased on the day they ate the produce of the land, and the Israelites no longer had manna; they ate the crops of the land of Canaan that year.

*2 Corinthians 5:16-21 (NRSV)*

From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, we know him no longer in that way. <sup>17</sup> So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! <sup>18</sup> All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; <sup>19</sup> that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. <sup>20</sup> So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. <sup>21</sup> For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

*Luke 15:1-3, 11b-32 (NRSV)*

All the tax collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to [Jesus]. <sup>2</sup> And

the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, “This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them.”<sup>3</sup> So he told them this parable:

<sup>11</sup> “There was a man who had two sons. <sup>12</sup> The younger of them said to his father, ‘Father, give me the share of the property that will belong to me.’ So he divided his property between them. <sup>13</sup> A few days later the younger son gathered all he had and traveled to a distant country, and there he squandered his property in dissolute living. <sup>14</sup> When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that country, and he began to be in need. <sup>15</sup> So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs. <sup>16</sup> He would gladly have filled himself with the pods that the pigs were eating; and no one gave him anything. <sup>17</sup> But when he came to himself he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired hands have bread enough and to spare, but here I am dying of hunger! <sup>18</sup> I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; <sup>19</sup> I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands.’”<sup>20</sup> So he set off and went to his father. But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him. <sup>21</sup> Then the son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’ <sup>22</sup> But the father said to his slaves, ‘Quickly, bring out a robe--the best one--and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. <sup>23</sup> And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; <sup>24</sup> for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!’ And they began to celebrate. <sup>25</sup> “Now his elder son was in the field; and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. <sup>26</sup> He called one of the slaves and asked what was going on. <sup>27</sup> He replied, ‘Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has got him back safe and sound.’ <sup>28</sup> Then he became angry and refused to go in. His father came out and began to plead with him. <sup>29</sup> But he answered his father, ‘Listen! For all these years I have been working like a slave for you, and I have never disobeyed your command; yet you have never given me even a young goat so that I might celebrate with my friends. <sup>30</sup> But when this son of yours came back, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fatted calf for him!’ <sup>31</sup> Then the father said to him, ‘Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. <sup>32</sup> But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found.’”

When I first became a Christian I wanted to share my faith with a friend. So I opened the Bible to share some passages about Jesus with him. He had been raised Catholic, and was accustomed to hearing the Bible read in church, but otherwise he wasn't at all familiar with it. He told me, **"I know it's full of epistles and gospels."** Of course, he had it backwards. The Bible is the continuous story of God's love for humanity. It is full of God's truth—**"all things necessary to salvation"**<sup>1</sup>. But for our convenience on any given Sunday morning we extract bite-size chunks from the whole Bible and call them epistles and gospels—and psalms and Old Testament lessons.

I say this to call our attention to our gospel reading this morning. It's been extracted from the Gospel of Luke. You'll notice that the passage has been shortened. I've included the verse numbers so we can see how. We've been given Luke chapter 15, the first 3 verses, then from verse 11b (the second half of verse 11) through verse 32, the end of the chapter. That means that verses 4 through the first half of verse 11 have been left out.

Verses 4 through 10 contain two other short parables. The first part of verse 11 is the words, **"Then Jesus said,"** which is Jesus' introduction to the longer parable, what we usually call the Parable of the Prodigal Son. This introduction is left out so that Luke's introduction in verse 3 of the two shorter parables reads like the introduction to the longer one. You probably remember the two shorter parables: the parable of the lost sheep and the parable of the lost coin. The shepherd has a hundred sheep, but leaves the ninety-nine to search out the one lost sheep. Jesus ends the parable by saying, **"And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my lost sheep.' Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance."** The second parable is about the woman who loses a valuable coin somewhere in her house. She turns the house upside down to find it, and when she does, Jesus says, **"she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost.' Just so, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents."**

We'll come back to these parables in a few minutes, but for now, let's look at verses 11b-32, what's often called "The Parable of the Prodigal Son." We usually think of this as God's message that even the worst sinner can repent, return to God, and be forgiven, like the younger son in the parable. This is

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<sup>1</sup> Article VI of the Articles of Religion, Prayer Book p. 868

understandable when you read the “punch lines” from the two shorter parables. God is searching for lost sinners, to bring them back to himself. The longer parable seems to continue that theme. And of course that’s very true.

But let’s look at it in more detail. Much of what I’m about to say is borrowed from Tim Keller’s book and video of teachings on this parable called “The Prodigal God.”<sup>2</sup> The father has two sons. The younger asks for his inheritance before it’s really due to come to him, that is, before his father dies. Now in first-century Jewish culture, this would have been extremely offensive and disrespectful. It reminds me of something my brother said to our mother when he was about 3 or 4 years old: **“Mommy, when you die, can I have your keys?”** That sounds cute, doesn’t it? As a little child, he thought being a grownup meant having keys, and he wanted to be grown up. But it’s sort of like saying, **“Mommy, would you please die so I can have your keys?”**

But the younger son in the parable isn’t a child—he’s an adult. He’s as good as wishing his father dead. He’s not interested in his father; he just wants his father’s wealth. But the father gives him his inheritance anyway, which would have been one third of his estate, leaving two thirds for his older brother. The younger son goes off to a far country to waste it by having a good time. He wants to get as far as he can from his father or anyone else who might disapprove.

While he’s gone, his father looks for him every day. That’s why the father can see him coming home while he’s still far off. When the younger son hits rock bottom in the pigsty and comes back to his father as a hired servant, the father runs down to the road to meet him and throws a party to welcome him home with the younger son as the guest of honor.

Jesus then moves the focus of the parable to the older brother. The servant tells him his father is throwing a party to welcome his younger brother home. He’s furious. He’s so mad he won’t even go into the house. When his father comes out to reason with him, he confronts his father. He says, **“Listen! For all these years I have been working like a slave for you, and I have never disobeyed your command; yet you have never given me even a young goat so that I might celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours came back, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fatted calf for him!”** He won’t even acknowledge the father as his father or his

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<sup>2</sup> The Prodigal God: Recovering the Heart of the Christian Faith: Keller, Timothy: 9781594484025: Amazon.com: Books

younger brother as his own brother—he calls him **“this son of yours.”** He says he feels like a slave in his father’s house.

We call this the Parable of the Prodigal Son because we focus on the lostness of the younger son. But the older son is *just as lost* to his father. Like his younger brother, he’s not interested in his father. He’s interested in his father’s wealth. Referring to himself as a slave and his brother as **“this son of yours”** shows he’s distanced himself from his father as well as his brother. He’s using words you’d expect from someone outside the family.

Remember that in this chapter Jesus tells three parables, not just this one. Why? The first two verses of our reading tell us: **“All the tax collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to [Jesus]. And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, ‘This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them.’”** Jesus was speaking to two specific audiences: tax collectors and sinners *and* Pharisees and scribes.

There are two ways that people try to find themselves, or approach life, or understand the world. One is by breaking all the rules, going past all the limits—that’s what the younger son did. And that’s what the tax collectors and sinners did. But the second way is to try to be good, to follow all the rules and stay well within the limits. That’s what the Pharisees and scribes did. That’s the older son. Jesus is addressing the tax collectors and sinners in the younger son, *and* the Pharisees and scribes in the older son. He’s showing that both groups of people are just as lost to God the father.

This goes against everything the people who first heard this parable thought or believed. It might go against everything some of us believe. Why shouldn’t the rule-keeping brother be angry that his father welcomed the rule-breaking brother back into the family? And not only welcomed him, but killed him a fatted calf, and gave him a new robe and a ring and a party? It’s outrageous!

In Jesus’ culture the older son got a double portion of the father’s estate when the father died. To accomplish this, the father had divided his estate into three parts: one for the younger son, and two parts for the older son. We’ve seen what the younger son did with his third. So when the father tells the older son, **“all that is mine is yours,”** he’s accurately describing their relationship. Everything the father owns now belongs to the older brother.

This only gives the older brother yet more cause for his alienation. Because his father is dressing his no-good younger brother in *his* robe, and giving him a ring *that belongs to him*, and feasting him with *his* fatted calf. When his father welcomes his younger brother back, it's costing the older brother a lot—a big reduction in the value of his father's estate.

We see the older brother even further alienated from his father when we ask if maybe someone from the family shouldn't have gone after the younger brother to bring him back. This is where the parables of the lost sheep and the lost coin come in. They're both about someone searching for something that's lost. They both show how eager God is to seek people who are lost. In Jesus' culture it would have been the older brother's responsibility to go looking for his younger brother, but he didn't. He just stayed on the farm and did his chores. He didn't care about either his father or his brother.

And then Jesus abruptly ends the parable. He has the father say, **“Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found.”** That's it. We don't know if or how the older son was reconciled to his family.

Jesus is challenging his original audience of rule-breakers and rule-keepers. And he's challenging us. In order to come back to the family of God, in order to be filled with God's peace and joy and the connection he gives us with him and his people, we have to repent of all the bad things we do, all our sins, all our rule breaking. But we also have to repent of all the good things we do to try to get the Father to love us and approve of us. The rule-keeping brother is just as lost as his rule-breaking brother. We have to understand that God is so eager and zealous to bring lost people to himself that he sent our Older Brother to find us. He's the one who has kept all the rules for us, because we never can.

That's why Paul ends our New Testament reading by saying, **“For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”** God has sent our older brother Jesus **“for our sake.”** He perfectly kept every rule and command of his Father. That's what it means that **“he knew no sin.”** But God wants us back in the family so badly that he **“made him to be sin.”** He took all *our* sin, past, present and future, on to himself on the cross. Our sin is so serious, God had to do that to forgive us. All our sin has all died with him. But like the older brother in the parable, it cost him dearly. It cost him terrible suffering and a barbaric death. And in exchange, he gave us the perfect righteousness, the perfect rule-keeping

of our Older Brother. That's what Paul means when he says, **“that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”**

So this Lent, let's repent both of the sin of disobeying God's commands, and the sin of trying to be good and work ourselves into his good graces. Let's remember that it's God who does the saving, not us. Let's understand that Jesus is our Older Brother who takes all our sins and in exchange gives us his perfect righteousness that we can receive as a gift by believing and trusting in him.

Amen.