

**4th Sunday in Lent**  
**Luke 15:1-3, 11-32.**

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all.  
Amen.

The text for the sermon is the Gospel heard before, Luke 15.

**1 All the tax-collectors and other sinners were coming to Jesus to hear Him. 2 However, the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled and said, "This Man welcomes sinners and eats with them."**

**3 So He told them this parable:**

**11 Jesus said: "A certain man had two sons. 12 The younger one of them asked his father, 'Father, give me my share of the property!' So he divided his property between them. 13 Not many days later the younger son got together all he had, and left home for a distant country, and there he wasted his possessions in wild living. 14 When he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. 15 He went and attached himself to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. 16 He longed to fill up on the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one would give him anything. 17 When he came to himself, he said, 'How many of my father's hired men have plenty of bread, and here I am starving to death. 18 I shall get up and go to my father and tell him, "Father, I have sinned against Heaven and against you. 19 I do not deserve to be called your son any more. Make me one of your hired men!"' - 20 "So he got up and went to his father. While he was still far away, his father saw him and was filled with compassion. He ran, fell on his neck, and kissed him. 21 The son told him, 'Father, I have sinned against Heaven and against you. I do not deserve to be called your son any more.'**

**22 "The father told his slaves, 'Quickly, bring out a robe, the best one, and put it on him! Put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet! 23 Bring the fattened calf, kill it, and let us eat and begin to celebrate! 24 For this son of mine was dead, and has come to life again. He was lost and has been found.' So they began to celebrate.**

**25 "His elder son was in the field. As he was coming in and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. 26 So he called one of the servants, and asked what this meant.**

**27 "The servant answered, 'Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has received him back safe and sound.'**

**28 "However, the elder brother became angry and would not go in. So his father came out and pleaded with him.**

**29 "However, he answered his father, 'Look! All these years I have been working like a slave for you and have never disobeyed a command of yours, and yet you have never given me a little goat to celebrate with my friends. 30 However, as soon as this son of yours has come back, who has squandered your property with prostitutes, you have killed the fattened calf for him.'**

**31 "The father told him, 'Son, you are always with me, and everything that I have is yours; 32 but we had to celebrate and be glad. For this brother of yours was dead, and has come to life. He was lost, and has been found.'"**

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us in your truth. Your Word is truth. **Amen.**

Dear friends in Christ,

Peace be with you.

You've probably heard me say before today's Gospel comes from the great "Lost & Found" chapter of the Bible a chapter with one giant parable of three individual stories. - The first story is the story of the lost sheep: **"Which man among you who has a hundred sheep, if he loses one of them, does not leave the other ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the lost one until he finds it?"** [Luke 15:4.] - Then there's the story of the lost coin: **"Or which woman who has ten silver coins, if she loses one coin, does not light a lamp, sweep the house, and look for it carefully until she finds it?"** [Luke 15:8.] - Finally, we have the story in today's Gospel: : **"A certain man had two sons. 12 The younger one of them asked his father, 'Father, give me my share of the property!' So he divided his property between them.** - These three stories are a matched set and it is too bad that we have such a short church service that we don't have time to study all three stories together.

Jesus told this triple parable in response to the arrogance of the Pharisees and the scribes. - The Pharisees and the scribes just don't seem to get the point. When they say, **"This man receives sinners and eats with them,"**

they are saying that Jesus is doing what He is supposed to be doing. They keep saying this as though Jesus should be ashamed of it when rescuing sinners is the whole point of Jesus' ministry. Jesus Himself said, **“Those who are healthy do not need a doctor, but those who are sick. - I have not come to call righteous people, but sinners, to repentance.”** [Luke 5: 31,32.]

This massive parable comforts the sinners with whom Jesus ate and instructs the scribes and Pharisees who criticized Him. - In each of the first two stories, something was lost. In both cases, someone had to go looking for the lost item. In both cases the finder rejoiced over the recovery. In both cases, Jesus spoke of the joy in heaven over the one sinner who repents. - The point of these two parables is that it is God's will to draw sinners into repentance and so bring them back into God's family. - How comforting this must have been to tax collectors and sinners who heard these gracious words. How comforting this should be for us poor helpless sinners as well. These two stories lead up to the third story in this parable by illustrating the worth of sinners in God's eyes, and the joy in heaven over those who repent. The third story brings this teaching into a human family, - a father and two sons.

When the younger son said to his father, **‘Father, give me my share of the property!’**, he was basically saying, "Dad, I wish you were dead so that I could have your stuff." The normal response would be for the father to explode in rage, throw the son out of the house, and disown him. - And the culture of the day would expect the father to declare that his son is dead to him and he's to be treated as a stranger. - Nevertheless, Jesus tells us that the father divided his property between them.

Jesus then takes the younger son down into the pit of despair. The son converted his inheritance into cash and used it to run away. Then he spent the money in foolish and wasteful ways. - Finally, a drought hit and he was desperately poor for the first time in his life, and to top it all off Jesus tells us that he was so poor that he was looking after a herd of ceremonially unclean pigs, he had slipped so low that he was even willing to eat the pods out of the pen that the pigs were being kept and fed! - The pigs were walking reminders of the filth of his very soul.

At the same time, the people who were listening to Jesus' story would think that the youth was only getting what he deserved for his disrespect. He had shamed his father, his family, and even the village where his family lived. A quick death was too good for this young man. - Let him starve to death among the pigs. - That would be justice.

It's in this deepest depth of despair that this son works out one last plan. - He will return to his father, but not as his son. Instead, he will simply ask to be hired as an ordinary worker. Perhaps his father would overlook the shame and humiliation he had brought to his family and allow him to be a lowly labourer. - His shame would be enormous, but at least he would live.

Farmers in first century Israel lived together in villages with other farmers and not on the land they farmed. When this son returns, He not only has to endure the rebuke of his father and family, but he must also endure the rebuke of the community. - The young man will be mocked by a crowd that will gather spontaneously as word of his return flashes around the village. - This mocking might even be physically dangerous.

Here we see the father throw his dignity out the window. Jesus said, **"While he was still far away, his father saw him and was filled with compassion. He ran, fell on his neck, and kissed him."**

Now, we are used to seeing people jog for their health, or just for fun, but in first century Israel, men wore robes, not tracky-dacks and cross trainers. If you want to run in a robe, you have to lift it up so you don't trip on it. So, think this old guy with his robes lifted up just a bit - spindly legs sticking out and going like crazy, - sandals slapping on the ground, - hair and beard fluttering in the wind. - It's embarrassing. - The people who saw the father run would be thinking something like, "Look at that old coot with his robes flapping in the breeze like that, he's going to break his neck! - His family really needs to find a way to keep him from going out in public." Maybe his friends would look the other way and pretend they didn't see him.- His servants would be following along frightened that he might fall and hurt himself.

As the son approached the village, he prepared for the gauntlet of ridicule and hatred he must endure as he makes his way through the village. - The villagers might even decide to shame him with spit and stones on his way to his father's house, of course this is all speculation, the bible doesn't tell us - But the bible does tell us what he saw and happened next as he approached! - His own father running to greet him, the father wasn't ashamed or embarrassed, he ran and hugged and kissed his lost rebellious son.

Then the father said to his servants, **‘Quickly, bring out a robe, the best one, and put it on him! Put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet! Bring the fattened calf, kill it, and let us eat and begin to celebrate! For this son of mine was dead, and has come to life again.’** - This is more than just a father concerned about the wellbeing of his son. By instructing the servants to dress his son, he is reinstating the son as master over the servants. The father's every activity works to honour this wayward son. - Now, instead of walking through the village in shame, the son walks in honour at his father's side. Let the party begin!

Here we have an illustration of our relationship with Jesus Christ. - Our sin showed utter disrespect for God. We shamed and embarrassed Him. - We deserved eternal separation from Him. Nevertheless, He was willing to undergo a lot more shame than running with his robes flapping in the breeze. - He endured spitting and beating and flogging. - Then He hung naked on a cross for all the world to see. He endured the forsakenness of our sin. He did all this so that we could live in honour forever at His side. - His embarrassment and shame earned eternal life for us. That's what this story is teaching us. - Here is God willing to undergo any shame in order to bring us back into His family.

But the story isn't over. What about the older son? - Although the older son stayed home, he really had no respect for his father. - He should have gone in immediately to join his father as host. Instead, he showed suspicion by asking an outsider what was happening. - Even though his father humiliated himself by coming out to him, the older son refused to come to the party. The older son further shamed his father by arguing with him within ear shot of the guests. - The older son is now the one who has embarrassed his father. He is in the process of bringing shame on himself, his father, his family, and the village. - Although he didn't run off, he's not all that different than the younger son.

Once again, the father humiliates himself in order to restore the relationship with his older son. According to the culture, he should go nuclear. - Instead, he begs him to join the party to welcome back his brother. - Now a father shouldn't have to beg his son. - The son should be willing to serve the father. Instead, this father is ready to serve the son.

Jesus didn't say what the older brother did. - You see the facts that Jesus illustrated with this story are still going on. - The older brother represented the Pharisees and anyone else who resents it when the Holy Spirit brings sinners into the family of God. - Some of those Pharisees will reconsider and rejoice that Jesus receives sinners and eats with them. Other Pharisees will turn away in rejection and plot to kill Jesus. - In the terms of the parable: sometimes the older son will join the party and other times the older son will kill the father.

Not only does that older brother represent the scribes and the Pharisees, but he also represents many people who live today. This story even causes us to ask some hard questions about ourselves. Does our pride make us like the older brother? - Are we willing to miss out on God's gifts because we don't get our own way? Do we actually think that our agenda is superior to God's agenda? - Is the agenda of the culture around us more important than the agenda laid out in God's Word? How will the story end for us?

We who believe on the Lord Jesus Christ as our Saviour from sin know how the story turns out for us. - As God the Son serves us with His Divine Service, He brings heaven to earth. - He Himself is the host and the feast as He gives us His body and blood. - We regularly join the heavenly hosts at the feast of the Lord's Table and look forward to the day when we will never leave the eternal feast of the Lamb of God. For those older brothers who repent and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, we can literally end this story with the words, "And he went in with joy to celebrate with his Father and brother and they lived," not "happily ever after," but "happily forever and ever."

**Amen**

The peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. **Amen.**

### **Prayer of the Church Fourth Sunday in Lent**

L People loved by God, let us come before our Father's throne of grace with confidence through our Lord Jesus and, in the power of His Spirit, ask His mercy for all in need.

*Brief Silence,*

L Kind and gracious Father, we are not worthy to be called Your children, and yet in love You have embraced us, named us Your own, and made us, by Your beloved Son, co-heirs of all things. Remember all Your baptized children and stir up in them a desire for a life of communion with You. Lord, in Your mercy,

**C hear our prayer.**

L Holy One, Your Son sends forth His messengers of reconciliation into all the world. Keep all those in the Office of the Holy Ministry faithful in their preaching and administration of the Sacraments so that Your Church may be built up and strengthened, kindly regard this family of Your people, that we might give a hearty welcome to all fellow repentant sinners and assure them that they are wanted and loved in Your house. Lord, in Your mercy,

**C hear our prayer.**

L Giver of salvation, remember the places where we teach and learn Your Word, look in mercy upon this congregation, and all congregations of the AELC and the ULMA. Kind and loving Lord, bless our pastors and their families and church workers, that they may be faithful and their service fruitful. Lord, in Your mercy,

**C hear our prayer.**

L Loving Lord, there is no sin that Your Son did not carry to death, no one for whom His sacrifice was not offered. Call those who have wandered from their baptismal birthright home to You and renew them by Your Spirit. Lord, in Your mercy,

**C hear our prayer.**

L Mighty King, Your Word commands us to pray for all those in authority. You we commend all who have been entrusted with authority in our land, For those who make, administer and judge our laws; for the causes of peace and justice, here and throughout the world; for those in the armed forces who protect and defend us against our enemies; for laws that are good and just and for judges who are wise and faithful, for those who care for the sick and injured, especially doctors, nurses, technicians, and all medical workers, the police the SES and fire brigades, that they carry out their calling with joy and dedication as they seek to preserve life and care for all, protect them from evil and guide them in paths that are pleasing to You. Lord, in Your mercy,

**C hear our prayer.**

L God our Healer, look with kindness on those who are taking treatments, those suffering from chronic illness or recovering from accidents, those who mourn and all for whom our prayers are desired [especially

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joy in sorrow; their health in sickness and their life in death. Lord, in Your mercy,

**C hear our prayer.**

L Great I Am, You are the life that never ends and the source of all that is. Receive our thanks and praise for the victory over death and the grave, which Your Son won for us. With joy we remember those who have departed this life in His faith and friendship. Bring us with them to share the joys of Your eternal home. Lord, in Your mercy,

**C hear our prayer.**

L Join our prayers and praises with those of Your faithful people of every time and every place and unite them in the ceaseless petitions of our great High Priest until He comes again in power and great glory as victorious Lord of all. Through Him, with Him and in Him, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, all glory and honour is Yours, almighty Father, forever and ever!

**C Amen.**