

## Connecting to Jesus the Storyteller...“The Prodigal”

Hillsboro Presbyterian Church

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**“My son,’ the father said, ‘you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. 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.’” Luke 15:31-32 (11-32)**

Dads, it is good that you are here. We learn from Jesus in this parable about an amazing father and his 2 sons...and all are prodigals! You see, the word “prodigal” means “reckless”, whether “wasteful” or “extravagant”. So put down your mental remote control and let’s learn from Jesus.

### **FIRST \* THE YOUNGER SON, aka “The Prodigal Son” is reckless with his life.**

This kid comes to his dad and says **“give me my share of the estate”** (15:12). Estates, then and now, aren’t given until one dies. So “Dad, I wish you were dead so I could get my inheritance.” And instead of giving him his comeuppance, his dad gives him his portion. We aren’t told why, but we recognize the attitude. Not surprisingly, this prodigal son **“squandered his wealth in wild living”** (15:13) in a country **“distant”** from his father. No question about his prodigal behavior! We’ve all heard of lottery winners who blew their winnings and ruined their life. This young rebel knew all the stops along the way. But when Jesus says **“he had spent everything”** (15:14), he means not only his money...but his identity, his dignity, his freedom, his self-respect, his everything. Why else would he feed pigs? A job, no Jew, would do. Animals, God said, were unclean. This would be viewed as a fate worse than death. It is tragic when people take their lives because they believe they have lost everything. We had one such father here in Hillsboro this past month. Never get into the trap of this world that tells you that you are what you own or what you do or how you look or how popular you are. Fame, fortune, health, friends, and even family – are all temporary or mortal. The power of faith is a God who gives us identity and value and purpose – things that can never be taken away in this world because they come from God. If all your wealth is outside of you – emptiness, spiritual famine, and despair are never far away. Only God offers a fortune you can never lose – in this world and the next.

### **SECOND \* THE ELDER SON, is also a prodigal with his reckless opinions.**

Listen to his high-minded, self-righteous tirade when he heard the band playing for his younger brother: **“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. But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you killed the fattened calf for him!”** (15:29-30) Now, he does have a point. What would happen if everyone acted like the younger son and no one like his older brother? What would happen to our traditions and our morals, not to mention our economy, if everyone quit their job and flew off to the Bahamas and squandered their life savings? The older son represents all that we value: responsibility, hard work, perseverance, and dependability. Remember the word for “elder” in the New Testament is “Presbyterian”! We, church people, may identify with this “Presbyterian” son. And even though his heart is wrong - his father doesn’t put him down. In fact, his father honors him - **“My son, you are always with me and everything I have is yours.”** (15:31) His identity, faithfulness, and inheritance are affirmed. Nevertheless, the older brother carries his anger to prodigal heights. What he has forgotten is that the farm still belongs to the father, not to him. It may be in his name but his father is still alive. The working capital, the pension funds, the medical insurance, all the benefits come from the father. Every opportunity he has had to educate his mind, to hone his skills, and to expand his experience - all has come from the father. Many who pride themselves on living well think they have done it themselves. But in fact, all that we have and are come from God. And if we have done well, we have no right to requisition a bigger party than those who wasted what they had and came home only when they had nowhere else to go. For if they are indebted to God, so are we. If they have cause to be thankful, so have we. And what a colossal pity it would be if we stood outside arguing how good we are, only to miss the party. But no one has to miss the party because there is a third prodigal in this story. . .

### **THIRD \* THE WAITING FATHER is prodigal with his reckless love.**

This father who gazes out the window all day and keeps the porch light on all night. This father spots his son **“a long way off”** (15:20), hitches up his Palestinian maxi-shirt, **“ran to his son”** (15:20), cuts off his son’s carefully rehearsed speech of repentance, and calls for the biggest luau the town had every seen. You can’t appreciate how prodigal his behavior is until you understand that in the Middle East wealthy men just don’t behave like that in public. The more wealthy, the more cultured, the more prominent a man...then the more slow his walk, the more dignified his posture, the more controlled his behavior. But this father runs to his son, embraces him, puts an identity ring on his finger, and celebrates his return. He is reckless in his love for this son who was reckless with his life.

You won’t be surprised to hear that the father in the parable is a stand-in for our Father in Heaven. What may surprise you is to hear God described as prodigal...but our God is “lavishly abundant” in His love for his children. God’s grace is lavishly abundant. Romans 5:21 says **“where sin increased, grace increased all the more...”** No one is beyond the redemptive love of God. And God’s eyes are always scanning the horizon for his errant children...God’s feet are always ready to rush to our rescue...God’s hands are always open to receive us back...and God’s inclination is always ready to throw a party - whether for those who serve him all their days or for those who crash the party at midnight. And our Waiting Father brings us to our fourth prodigal.

### **FOURTH \* THE STORYTELLER JESUS is prodigal with his reckless mercy and grace.**

Jesus looked a convicted adulteress in the eye and said, **“Neither do I condemn you, go now and leave your life of sin.”** (John 8:11) That is prodigal mercy. Jesus singled out Peter after his triple denial and said, **“Feed my sheep.”** (John 20:17) That is prodigal grace. Jesus prayed with his dying breath, **“Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.”** (Luke 23:34) That is prodigal forgiveness. Jesus who **“being found in human form, humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.”** (Philippians 2:8) That is prodigal love. It is prodigal that the eternal Son of God would be born on earth as a baby human. It is prodigal that the Son of God would go to the Cross for us. It is prodigal that Christ Jesus would deal with our past - and create for us a future that is abundant and eternal.

If you think you are beyond the reach of Jesus...for whatever reason, then you are like The Prodigal Son and you don’t understand that Jesus would go to hell and back to get through to you just how much God loves you. And if you think you don’t need Jesus because you are such a good person, then you are like The Elder Son and you need to know that pride, complacency, and self-satisfaction are just as far from the kingdom of God as hedonism. Our Father God awaits us and Jesus reaches out to us – and we who are lost are found – and **“heaven rejoices”** (15:7,9).