

**MINISTRY BY MAIL**  
**Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship**  
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**Tenth Sunday After Trinity, July 31, 2016**

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 318, 321:1, 324, 373, 373:7.

Lessons: Psalm 51:1-13, 1 Peter 4:1-7, Luke 15:1-10.

Sermon Text: Luke 15:11-32

Sermon by Pastor M. H. Eibs

In Christ Jesus, the Friend of Sinners, Fellow Redeemed,

In teaching ability the Lord Jesus has no equal. When he first preached at Nazareth, the Bible says: *“All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his lips.”* Luke 4:22 (NIV) After Jesus had taught some parables, the Bible says: *“When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law.”* Matthew 7:28-29 (NIV) Jesus is the greatest, the wisest, the most eminent teacher and preacher. We can only stand by with amazement at his words!

Our text is one of the best examples of Jesus’ teaching ability. In this parable of the prodigal son Jesus shows sin in all its damnableness and the Gospel of Christ in all its sweetness. We need to hear this parable because it is an example of how every fallen sinner who repents is received again because of the heavenly Father’s grace in Christ. Let us give our attention to:

**THE HEAVENLY FATHER’S LOVE FOR THE SINNER WHO COMES TO REPENTANCE**

We consider:

1. A deeply fallen sinner gone astray from the father;
2. The sinner becomes penitent and acknowledges his sin;
3. The Father’s amazing love for the penitent sinner; and,
4. The self-righteous conduct of those who will not rejoice over the sinner’s penitence.

*“There was a man who had two sons. The younger one said to his father, ‘Father, give me my share of the estate.’ So he divided his property between them.”* We do not find fault with this request of the younger son. It was not wrong for him to request his share of the estate of his father. What was wrong was what he did after he got his inheritance. *“Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living.”* He was like so many young people of today. They can’t wait until they get out of the parents’ house and away from their restraining authority and advice. They want to get away by themselves so they can have their wild parties and do as they please.

Doing what they please does not please the Lord. Peter writes: *“You have spent enough time in the past doing what pagans choose to do—living in debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing and detestable idolatry.”* 1 Peter 4:3 (NIV) The Lord exhorts: *“Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world—the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does—comes not from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever.”* 1 John 2:15-17 (NIV)

The prodigal son’s wild living spree ended up with him being in abject poverty, and there was a famine in that country. *“So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him*

**anything.**” Feeding pigs was the lowest work imaginable for a Jew. And he was not even given pig food to eat, the carob pods that were fed to the pigs.

This is a picture of every sinner, and especially of a deeply fallen sinner. Some have fallen more deeply into the mire of sinful living than others. But all of us have gone astray from our heavenly Father. Isaiah describes us when he says: **“We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way.”** Isaiah 53:6 (NIV) This parable is also a clear warning to all young people – really, to all people – who are tempted to indulge in wild, loose living, and don’t want to listen to God’s Word. That kind of life can only end up in misery and disaster.

It is, therefore, a very precious blessing when such a sinner becomes penitent and acknowledges his sin. Of this our text tells us.

2.

**“When he 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!’”** In his past life he had probably made jokes about his father as a strict old man. Now he realized what a mess he had made of his life, and longed for the good things he had once had. Now he came to repentance. Just how this happens in the life of a sinner may often vary according to outward circumstances. But one thing is sure: the Law of God produces contrition, sorrow for sin, and the Gospel of Christ is the powerful word to work faith in Christ and trust in God’s grace and mercy for the Savior’s sake.

The prodigal son made an unconditional confession: **“Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired men.”** Gone was his arrogant pride. He was too deeply conscious of his sins to think that he could now be received again as a son. He was content to be like a hired man. True penitence, then, consists in openly confessing our sins and humbly trusting in the Father’s mercy. David writes: **“The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.”** Psalm 51:17 (NIV) The Book of Proverbs also says: **“He who conceals his sins does not prosper, but whoever confesses and renounces them finds mercy.”** Proverbs 28:13 (NIV)

To all of us who are ashamed of our past sins, the poet encourages us, saying: “Today Thy mercy calls us To wash away our sin. However great our trespass, Whatever we have been, However long from mercy Our hearts have turned away, Thy precious blood can cleanse us And make us white today.” (The Lutheran Hymnal 297:1)

The parable in our text also now tells us of the father’s amazing love for the penitent sinner.

3.

**“So he got up and went to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.”** The father must have often thought about his wayward son and shed many a tear over him. No doubt he had given up and considered his son lost for good. But when he saw this vagabond, penniless beggar coming down the road in the distance, he showed amazing love for him. Wouldn’t there be a great temptation to reject someone who had wasted his inheritance and spent it all on prostitutes and drinking? What would we have done? The father in the parable by all his actions showed his deep love for his wayward son. He threw his arms around him and kissed him with great affection.

He did not even let his son finish his sorrowful confession of sins. When the son was about to say that he deserved to be only as his hired man, not as a son, the father told his servants: **“‘Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let’s have a feast and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’ So they began to celebrate.”** In every way possible, the father showed his love for his son. And in hearing his penitent confession of sins, he was most joyful and made plans to celebrate. His son indeed had been like one dead, dead in trespasses and sins, and now he was alive again, spiritually alive. He had been lost in sin, gone far astray, but now was returned to his father’s house.

Our text is a fine description of God’s love for the sinner. God did the most exceptional thing for the sinners of this world when he gave his one and only Son and sacrificed him on the cross to pay for their sins. Paul says: **“God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”**

Romans 5:8 (NIV) Besides that, God in his plan of salvation made it possible for the good news of salvation to be proclaimed to sinners. He also gives the Holy Spirit to work faith in the sinner's heart so that the good news is accepted and believed. Not one thing is left for man to do! God's salvation is a free gift! This is what Paul writes: ***"There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus."*** Romans 3:22-24 (NIV) And also in this passage: ***"I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes."*** Romans 1:16 (NIV) Indeed we have to say with David: ***"For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him."*** Psalm 103:11 (NIV)

And yet, not all rejoice when sinners come to repentance and the Father's love is shown. We learn in this parable of the self-righteous conduct of those who will not rejoice over the sinner's repentance.

4.

When the older brother came home and heard the music and saw the joyful celebration, he wanted to know what was going on. When he found out the reason for celebration, our text says: ***"The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him. But he answered his father, '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 kill the fattened calf for him!'"*** The father then repeated the reason for the celebration: ***"We had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found."*** There was no joy in this self-righteous brother's heart. He was simply bitter. He thought of himself as being the good person who always obeyed his father. He did not even speak of his brother, but referred to him as ***"this son of yours!"*** He wanted nothing to do with the penitent brother.

This is a good description of Phariseeism. The Pharisees in Jesus' day muttered concerning Jesus: ***"This man welcomes sinners and eats with them."*** Luke 15:2 (NIV) That's why Jesus told this parable. We have to beware of such Phariseeism in our own hearts. It is nothing but self-righteousness when we look down upon penitent sinners and refuse to rejoice when they come back to God's house and want to lead a new life.

If self-righteous Phariseeism lingers in our hearts and we think we are so much better than others whom we point at as great sinners, then we are on the way to hell. Let us rather humbly confess our own unworthiness and rejoice in God's amazing love for us. And having heard this precious Gospel message in our text, let us make this confession:

"By grace! None dare lay claim to merit;  
Our works and conduct have no worth.  
God in His love sent our Redeemer,  
Christ Jesus, to this sinful earth;  
His death did for our sins atone,  
And we are saved by grace alone." (The Lutheran Hymnal 373:2) Amen.

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