

March 25, 2001  
Faith Community  
4<sup>th</sup> in Lent

Joshua 5:10-15  
Luke 15:11-32

### **We Journey Not Alone**

In our Lenten journey on this 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of lent,  
We have the parable of the Prodigal Son.  
Pastor Henderson last Sunday reminded us  
That Lent is a time to repent,  
A time to examine our hearts and actions,  
To reflect on our relationship to others and to God.  
To me this is what happens in the Parable of the Prodigal Son.

How many of us feel the story of the young son who leaves home  
And comes to himself,  
Returning to his family,  
Is one of the most memorable stories of the Bible.

When we hear what happened in at Columbine High School,  
We ask, "How could teenagers kill their classmates  
In such a cold, unfeeling manner."  
When Black teens and Hispanic youth  
were using our streets as killing fields,  
we weren't too concerned.  
Suddenly we have come to understand  
That the next Columbine could be  
Novi High School.  
What is happening to our families  
That such violence seems to almost be a normal  
Happening in our communities.

San Francisco, Los Angeles, Ft Lauderdale,  
New York City,  
Hollywood, Los Vegas  
Have become havens for our runaway sons and daughters.  
How different is our day from the time Jesus  
Told the story of the Prodigal Son.

In our world today, we have more homeless people  
Than ever before.  
With the political upheavals in Africa,  
South America and Indochina,  
In the conflict between Israel and Palestine  
Even in Europe in the Slavic region,  
We have so many fleeing for their very lives  
With no place to turn,  
No place to feel safe.

As parents we ask,  
"Why do our daughters and sons join gangs?"  
We hear from gang members saying,

“The gang cares for me.  
The gang is there for me.”  
What does this say about our homes?

What was the home life like that the younger son  
Demanded his share of the family property?  
What kind of a father would divide his property  
And give a third to each son?  
Didn't he know what they would do?  
Jesus tells us,  
“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.”

What can the younger son do with his property?  
He sells it and turns his back on his family!  
Free at last!  
Free at last!  
Can't you just sense how he now felt free  
From his parent's nagging and control,  
And his older brother's put downs.  
Off he went to the bright lights of Alexander Egypt  
Or the tempting come-on of celebrated Rome.  
Now he could live the life of wine,  
Women and song he had  
Always dreamed about.

With his money, he soon had many friends  
Who surrounded him.  
Suddenly one day he realized his money was gone.  
His father wasn't there with an open pocketbook.  
How cruel to have a severe famine  
spreading across the land.  
He discovered people all over begging for food,  
Looking for any job,  
To avoid starvation.  
This wasn't what was supposed to happen.  
He didn't live happily ever after.  
This wasn't what freedom from his family was to be like.  
Of all things he had to do,  
He had to get a job.  
When he turned to his friends for help,  
He discovered they had deserted him.  
No one offered him a job!  
Have you ever been there?  
What about those who are being laid off  
In this time when our economy is slowing down?  
  
In desperation, he called on a hog farmer

Who needed a hired hand.  
For a Jewish youth,  
This was the dirtiest,  
Most embarrassing job a Hebrew man could have.  
He was so hungry that  
He felt the pigs were receiving better food than he.  
Why he would even eat the bean pods that he fed to the pigs  
To drive away the hunger pangs,  
“Because no one gave him anything.”

Were the pains he felt,  
The cry for food,  
Or the cry for love?  
How lonely!  
How deserted,  
He must have felt.

Then come those words of repentance.  
“He came to himself!”

“How many of my father’s hired hands have bread enough  
and to spare,  
but here I am dying of hunger!  
I will get up and go to my father,  
And say to him,  
“Father, I have sinned  
against heaven and before you;  
I am no longer worthy to be called your son;  
Treat me like one of your hired hands.”

Pastor Henderson talked about repentance being,  
“turning around, going in the other direction.”  
The Prodigal turned from being a son  
To desiring to be a servant of his father.  
He can to himself!

How difficult it must have been  
To swallow his pride and have to return home.  
He needed the love of his parents.  
He turns around and goes home.  
If he was starving,  
How did he manage to get home.  
He had burned his bridges behind him!  
It must have been the longest journey he even made.  
What would his father do to him?  
Could he even return home as a servant?

If this were our son or daughter,  
Or our grandson or granddaughter,  
What would we do with the Prodigal?

Can't you just see the father,  
Every day looking towards the horizon  
Hoping and praying his son would return!  
Is that a figure off in the distance?  
Is it?  
Could it be?  
Yes!  
It's his lost son!

Can you picture the father running across the dusty field.  
The joy welling up in his heart,  
gives him the energy to run with the wind.  
His arms are flung wide!  
He swallows his son against his breast.  
Tears of joy are flowing down his cheeks.  
Kisses smother his son  
As a voice sobs,  
"Father! I'm sorry!  
I have sinned against heaven  
And before you;  
I am no longer worthy to be called your son!"

Isn't this what we call repentance?  
Isn't this what lent is all about,  
Coming to ourselves?

Those lines he had rehearsed for so long,  
Were cut short by a compassionate voice,  
Saying to the servants:  
"Quickly, bring out a robe,  
the best robe,  
and put it on him.  
Put a ring on his finger  
And sandals on his feet.  
Oh yes!  
Kill the fatted calf.  
Let us eat and celebrate!  
For this son of mine was lost  
And is alive again!  
He was lost!  
Now he is found!  
Invite the whole village.  
We're going to celebrate.

How many of us could do this for our son or daughter,  
If they had gone off like the Prodigal?

Doesn't this parable make us feel good.  
What a happy ending.  
But wait!!!

Jesus continues the parable.  
The older son is out faithfully working in the fields.  
What is this he hears?  
Is that music coming from the family home?  
It's only Wednesday, not Friday  
When there is music and dancing.  
What special occasion could this be?

Seeing one of the servants all dressed up,  
He calls out,  
"What's going on over at the house?"

"Don't you know?"  
Your brother has returned!  
Everyone is so happy!  
Your father even had the prized calf killed.  
We're all celebrating his safe return!

We're brought up quickly by the older son's response.  
"He was so angry  
he wouldn't go into the house."  
Had the older brother been doing a slow burn?  
Was he jealous of his brother who left home?

Do we identify with the older brother?

Today we hear descriptions of dysfunctional families.  
Certainly this was a dysfunctional family.

What was the father to do now?  
His heart is overflowing with joy  
At his son's return.  
But what pain to hear the older son say,  
I'm not going to celebrate with you.

The father comes outside to plead with him  
Trying to get him to join in the celebration.  
How cutting those words must have been to the father,

"Listen!  
For all these years  
I have been working like a slave for you.  
I have never disobeyed your command.  
Yet you've never given me even a young goat,  
So that I might celebrate with my friends.  
But when this son of yours came back,  
Who devoured your property with prostitutes,  
You killed the fatted calf for him!"

Does the story end here?  
One son who repented!  
The other son turning his back on his father,

Walking away?

We don't know do we?  
Doesn't this bring us back to here and now?  
Where do we stand as God invites us to come  
And join in the celebration of those who have repented?  
Or are we in touch with the older brother,  
Feeling God's love is so wide  
Including those we feel  
God shouldn't forgive.  
Let us go forth with these words of Jesus ringing in our hearts.  
"Daughter, Son!  
Parent, Child!  
You are always with me.  
All I have is yours!  
We have to celebrate and rejoice!  
This brother of yours was dead  
And has come to life.  
He was lost  
And has been found!"

Amen