



Saint John United Methodist Church
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Message for May 15, 2022
"Home Construction: A Father's Love"
Speaker: Pastor Tom Grieb
Scripture: Luke 15:11-32

Charlie

On occasion, you have heard me speak about various members of our family. Let me introduce to another one.

This is Charlie. He is our 85-pound black lab. He's a lot of fun. When he is not eating, he's sleeping. He does like to go outside and mess around. We, almost always, have him on a leash. Every now and then, though, Cheryl and I will let him roam around. We live in an area with a lot of woods. We'll let him go with the hope he'll come back.

In fact, one of us will say, "*I sure hope he comes back.*" And immediately the other one will respond, "*He always does.*"

After about a half hour we begin to wonder. Much longer than that we get a little concerned. Our gaze is always outward looking for Charlie to pop out of the woods. When he does, we are both relieved and delighted. Cheryl and I always receive him warmly.

The Parable of the Lost Son

This morning we consider a warm reception of a different sort. Today we consider Christ's great Parable of the Lost Son. It follows two shorter parables about a lost coin and a lost sheep. In all three, there is great rejoicing when what was lost is found.

The Parable of the Lost Son is one of the most well-known, most beloved passages in the Bible. Even those who have never opened a Bible are aware of it. Some have even said that it is "*the greatest short story ever told.*"

In telling the Parable of the Lost Son, Jesus speaks a clear word about the love our Heavenly Father has for each of us.

The story Jesus tells draws us in. We listen closely to what Jesus says because we know the love of a father is that important. In the Parable of the Lost Son, the father's love is front and center. It is gracious, compassionate, and forgiving.

The father's love is clear for all to see and is a great example for all fathers.

Of course, we know that what Jesus is really talking about is the love our Heavenly Father has for each person, no matter how wayward or mixed up they might be. Even in our failings, God still loves us.

Let's read then the Parable of the Lost Son from Luke 15:11-32.

Jesus continued: "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.

"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. After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. 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.

"When he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: 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 servants.' 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 son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.'

"But the father said to 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.

The Story of Two Sons

The Parable of the Lost Son is really the story of two sons. Each was lost in his own way. The problem with the first son was that his priorities were messed up and because of that failed to notice his father's love. He was way too struck by the ways of the world. The second son felt as though love was something to be earned and because of that failed to live in the love that his all along. Interestingly, we see ourselves in both sons.

- We too have our priorities messed up.
- We too live as if love is something to be earned rather than received.

Letting Go

Our story for today has the younger son asking his father for his share of his inheritance. That was a highly unusual request, if for no other reason, because the father was still alive.

You have heard it said, *“If you love someone, let them go. If they don’t return, love was never there in the first place. If they do, it was there all along.”* The father loved his son enough to release him.

You may have heard this, *“If you squeeze a bar of soap too tightly it will slip out of your hand. If you hold it too loosely, it will fall to the ground.”* That’s certainly true for raising children.

Raising kids is a process, and not an easy one at that. Those of you who have either raised kids or are in the process of raising kids have probably noticed that.

At birth, children are totally dependent upon their parents. They can’t make it without someone to feed them, cloth them, or nurture them. As children get older though, they become less and less dependent. Children need their independence, but only in doses appropriate for their age.

There’s a tension at play in raising children. Parents have a tough time letting go, while children have a tough time managing their newfound freedoms.

Knowing how much independence to give a child is at best an approximate science. That’s true at every age and stage of childrearing, but particularly when it comes to raising an adolescent. The so-called *“departure stage”* of parenting can be downright painful. It’s not easy giving up the ones we love.

I have teased for years that we grieved *“the empty nest”* for about a decade, Cheryl longer than me.

In the end, we need to love our children enough to release them so that one day they can be well-adjusted, independent adults contributing to society in a positive way.

Parents can read every book on parenting, they can seek the counsel of others, they can even consult their own parents, but nothing quite prepares them for the grand experiment of raising children like doing it.

I know I felt totally inadequate when our oldest son, Brian was born. I didn’t know what I was doing. I can assure you I lifted a lot of prayers God’s way.

As we talked last week the stuff of releasing our children has everything to do with dedicating them to God. It also means dedicating ourselves to God.

When it comes to raising our children:

- We need to pray for God’s help.
- We need to seek God’s wisdom.
- We need to follow God’s lead.
- And above all things, we need to mirror God’s example.

A Loving Reunion

In Christ's parable, the father offered his inheritance, and the first son took his leave. He spent not only his money, but his life in "*wild and reckless living.*" It wasn't long before the son found himself with nothing and very much in need.

It was while looking up from the bottom of a pigsty that the son came to terms with the fact that he would have it a whole lot better back home with his father. He had awakened to the fact of how much he was missing out on, not the least of which was his father's love.

As the boy headed home, I am sure he had to wonder about what kind of reception he would receive. He very well may have thought that he would receive a tongue lashing, maybe a stern, "*I told you so,*" or even a cold shoulder.

None of these things happened. Instead, the boy's father received him with open arms. In fact, in noticing his son far off into the distance the father ran to his son, threw his arms around him, and kissed him. It was a reunion filled with love. The father left little doubt about his feeling for his son.

The Divine Example of Love

When it comes to *Home Construction*, we'd do well to build on the foundation of love. Our example is God himself who always receives us in his love. Psalm 103:13 puts it this way, "*As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him.*"

God's love is a worthy example for every relationship, and particularly, for those in family. While God never forces his way into our lives, he stays persistent. God knows that if true relationship is to be struck, our acceptance must play a part.

In the Parable of the Lost Son, the father risked letting his son go, so he might once and for all recognize his need and return ready to receive the love that was his all along. Even the second son, who thought love was best earned was left to recognize that his father's love was there all along. So then, in the end, the Parable of the Lost Son **really is** a parable about the love of a father who stands with his sons, regardless of the disposition of their hearts.

This is God's way with us, and it needs to be our way with others, particularly for those within our families. The call then as we find ourselves touched by God's love is to love and love again. In the end, when it comes to family, let's make sure that with God's help love prevails.

Rembrandt's The Prodigal Son

Rembrandt painted one of his more famous paintings a couple of years before his death in 1669. That painting is his depiction of the return of the prodigal son.

Interestingly, it was painted soon after the death of his son, Titus, with whom he was very close.

Rembrandt does a masterful job depicting the emotion that took place upon the son's return. The son falls to his knees before his father. We are left to think that tears of both joy and relief were shed. The father wraps the boy in an embrace that oozes with love.

Just behind the father is the faint image of a woman. It is understood that that's a reference to Rembrandt's first wife who had also died.

Home Construction is best accomplished when **everyone** is involved, and love is readily shared.

Family Is Not a Perfect World

It is not a perfect world when it comes to family, at least that's been my experience. I am confident it has been yours as well.

Family is made a lot better though when we are gracious with each other, when we exercise compassion, and when forgiveness is extended. Let's then love each other as God first loves us. He stands ready to help us with that. His love all but seals it.