

“Called Out by Jesus”

March 30, 2025

First Christian Church

Scripture Text: Luke 15: 1-3, 11-34

The Gospel of Luke gives us some great stories from Jesus that the other gospels do not include – stories like the Good Samaritan and today’s Prodigal Son. Unlike the Good Samaritan, this is not one of those “go and do likewise” kinds of stories. This one has tension and resolution, more tension and an open ending that leaves us wondering if things end in resolution or brokenness.

It is a well told story that starts out with all the characters together as an intact family – a father had 2 sons. Then it adds the tension. The younger son wants his inheritance now. He wants out of the house, to go out on his own and do things his way. Not necessarily a bad thing, but in the time, taking your inheritance early meant splitting up the farm while it still had multiple generations to support, and it was just plain rude. The younger son basically said to his father, “I wish you were dead.” Yet for some strange reason, the father does what his son asks. The father made it possible for him to indulge in the flesh. The young man takes his money, leaves town, and blows it all. He didn’t realize that an inheritance is not just the money. It is the skills, the work ethic, and the wisdom that is passed down from one generation to the other as well. Since he chose to leave those behind, he left the money behind as well.

The young man now has no money and has to take a job tending pigs in the field – the worst job ever, especially for a Jew. It says, “He would gladly have filled his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, and no one gave him anything.” Hitting bottom leads to the revelation moment in verse 17, “then he came to his senses and said, ‘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 I will 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.” So he heads back home, and while he was still some distance away, his father sees him, is filled with compassion, and comes running to greet him and welcome him home. It is a beautiful yet tough moment, because we don’t know how sincere the younger son is. Is he really sorry, or still just looking out for himself thinking this is the best way to get food? Is he trying to claim the skills, the work ethic and the wisdom of his inheritance or is he just playing his father? It is a legitimate question, but I don’t think the father cares. All he knows is his son is home. So he calls for a celebration. Tension healed.

But it is not that simple. There is the other brother who stayed home, did what he was supposed to do, followed all the rules and expectations. He had his own personal desires to party and go on vacation and spend money on himself; but he didn’t. He stayed. He worked. He

did what he was supposed to do. Nobody even came out to the fields to tell him his brother was home. They slaughtered his 4H calf for the party, and didn't even invite him. When he comes in from the field, he had to ask what the music was all about. There is no way he is going there! A party in his little brother's honor. What honor is there when you tell your father you would rather he was dead? What honor is there when you say you'd rather enjoy your life alone than with your family? What honor is there when you come back, hat in hand, having done nothing but disgrace yourself? The older brother is not going to honor that with his presence.

Back then even more so than now, children were supposed to go to their parents. Sons are supposed to come to their fathers. But again, the father goes to his son, begs him to come in and celebrate that the family is intact again. But the older son resists. He has done everything right and the father has never thrown a party in his honor. The father assures him that the farm and all its contents belong to the older son, then asks again if he will join the homecoming party. And that is where the story ends. We don't know if the older son joins the party or not.

Now a good preacher would recognize the beauty of the story and let it stand on its own. Sorry, no good preacher here this morning, because I want you to know what Jesus wanted you to get out of the story. That moment when the younger son comes to himself and recognizes that the inheritance was not just the money, but the skills, the work ethic, and the wisdom – that is good stuff. We can see that as Christians, our inheritance is not just eternal life but the life that we lead while on earth – the skills, work ethic and wisdom of God lived out here. That is part of the gift we inherit. That is good stuff, but not the main thing Jesus wants us to get from the story. The image of the father leaving the place He is supposed to stay and going out to both his sons, even running to greet the one, meeting them where they are, it is an incredible image. It is God coming to earth in Jesus, caring enough to come to us when it should be us going to God. That is good stuff, but not the main thing Jesus wants us to get from the story. The picture of justice, when the father affirms that all he has belongs to the older son, that the older son's inheritance will not be taken away from him and split with the younger son again. Justice is good, but not the main thing Jesus wants us to get from the story.

To find out what Jesus wants us to get from the story, we look at the introduction. Verses 1-3, "Now all the tax collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to Jesus. And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, 'This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them.' So He told them this parable." Actually Jesus told 3 parables, 3 stories of rejoicing when what was lost is found. All 3 parables, especially pointed in today's, are addressed to people like me, to people like most of you, to us older brother types. People who have done it like we were supposed to. People who went to school and took it seriously, who went to work, paid our taxes and raised a family. People who grew up in church, were baptized. People who put money in the offering tray even when money wasn't plentiful. People who tried to live good lives,

followed Jesus, took care of family, worked, saved and provided. Jesus looks straight at us, calls us out, and asks, “will you join the party?” Are you going to be like “the Pharisees and the scribes who were grumbling and saying, ‘This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them.’” (v.2) Or are you going to join the party?

Joining the party is going to feel like you are affirming the younger brother’s stupid decisions and actions. It is going to feel like you are on board with his wishing his Heavenly Father was dead, his ignoring all the inheritance except the money, his selfishness, his stupid words, his short-sighted choices and his self-destruction. It is going to feel like you are saying they are okay. It is going to feel that way because God’s mercy and grace are offensive. They are not fair. People are not getting what they deserve. Mercy is not giving sinners the punishment they deserve, and grace is giving sinners incredible gifts they don’t deserve. It is offensive because it was the older son’s calf that was slaughtered. It was his money that was spent to throw the party. The younger brother coming home costs him. It costs the kind of music I like in worship because those new people like different music. It costs the way I think people should dress to come to worship because they know it is about being accepted where you are when I know it is about bringing your best to God. It costs the kind of message I need for my life where I am now because they are in a different place in their walk than I am. It costs me my comfort zone, sometimes even my seat. It costs me doing church my way that feeds me. I have done things right. I have been here all along. Why do I have to pay?

Because that is what it is going to take to bring the family together again. For the very same God who ran to the one who lost their way, comes to you too, and invites you to the celebration for the sake of God whose family is one step closer to being together, being intact again.

I don’t like what Jesus wants me to get out of this passage, because it hits too close. I generally don’t like being lumped in with the scribes and Pharisees of Scripture, but that is who I am in the story. Jesus is calling me out, how about you? My taxes paid for him to go to school and he blew the opportunity because he wanted to follow his own desires, do it his own way, and follow his own ridiculous dream which had zero chance of working out. Now he needs help getting training to keep a job – and it is going to cost me to get it done. We told her that physical intimacy was a gift to be shared in marriage. She decided it was fun recreation and a great tool to manipulate men, and now I have to help pay for her to stay home with her children or pay for her daycare. My insurance premiums went up again because it paid for their drug rehab again. It is not like they didn’t know the drugs were evil and wrong, but they took them anyway. And when they get a little clue, God wants me to join the party thrown in their honor? God wants me to sit at the same table with them like we are equals. Why? It is not fair. Why, because in God’s world, people are not disposable. When they break or are damaged, we don’t just throw them away. We do everything we can to get them home again.

Jesus deliberately leaves this story open. It doesn't say if the older brother joined the party or not. It doesn't say if there is a happy ending with the family together again. Jesus invites us to fit ourselves into the story and act out the ending, as individuals and as church. Are we willing to welcome the sinners who respond to Christ's message? Are we willing to invite sinners to respond to Christ's message. Or is it going to be all about me.

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