

6 Mar 16 4th Sunday in Lent

Joshua 5:9-12 The Passover at Gilgal, in the Promised Land

2 Corinthians 5:16-21 In Christ the new has come

Luke 15:1-3,11b-32 The parable of the lost son

The Parable of the Lost Son

11 Jesus continued: "There was a man who had two sons. 12 The younger one said to his father, 'Father, give me my share of the estate.' So he divided his property between them.

13 "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. 14 After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. 15 So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. 16 He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything.

17 "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! 18 I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. 19 I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired servants.' 20 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.

21 "The son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.'

22 "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. 23 Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. 24 For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' So they began to celebrate.

25 "Meanwhile, the older son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. 26 So he called one of the servants and asked him what was going on. 27 'Your brother has come,' he replied, 'and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.'

28 "The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him. 29 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. 30 But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!'

31 "'My son,' the father said, 'you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. 32 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.'"

Loved Like a runaway.

Lost Child. That is a terrible combination of words, both for the child and for the parent. It does something to us when we hear of it. William Tyrell is a name that rests in the heart of a nation because we just don't know what happened to him. Parents everywhere are suffering because of this problem. Every now and then, a child goes missing and lives are torn apart. But it takes on a whole new meaning when it is the child who takes the initiative. Sometimes, young people decide that they are better off away from their family and they run away.

The National Missing Person's Unit says that of the 30,000 people reported missing each year, over half are under 18. These young people decide that they would like to see the world or run away from difficulty and they go missing. To complicate the issue, they are able to access support from Centrelink and the privacy act prevents the parents from finding out where they are. It is very difficult for a parent to find a child who decides to run away.

What would you do to get your child back?

It is a painful question to even consider.

The story of the prodigal son is one of extreme selfishness, where the young man in question simply decides that he would like a change of life. Normally a runaway does so at very short notice. There may be a bit of planning involved, but generally it is a response to something rather than a career choice. This son however plans his departure. It is going to take some time because his father needs to sell half of his property.

The young man is tired of the hard work, the responsibility that goes with being the boss's son, and he wants to branch out on his own and 'find himself'. To do that properly, he needs money. So he asks his father for his inheritance. Normally the only time you get your inheritance is when your father dies. -He is virtually saying that he wants his father dead. He wants to cash his chips and move on. His father allows this, sells up half of the property and bids his son farewell.

Things do not go well for the young man however and he eventually decides to return home, not as a son however, he is aware that he has burnt that bridge, but as a servant. He even rehearses his speech. *"Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. 19 I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired servants."* 20 So he got up and went to his father.

But what happens is fairly predictable, -for those of us who are parents at least. The father isn't interested in retribution or long discussions, He has been standing on the roof for years, watching and waiting for his boy to come home. It is only a parent who can grasp this, who can understand the feeling that that man would be going through. Only a parent understands the heart turmoil of a lost child. We don't even need to lose a child, but simply hearing about it or thinking about the possibility does things to us.

You have no idea of the turmoil God goes through over you! He suffers as a grieving parent over us human beings. God sheds tears for you and bleeds for you. When you are apart from God, he yearns for the time with you again, and he is jealous of every minute that you don't recognise Him as master of your life, that you think you know best for your own life and for the idols that creep in and steal your attention.

But if you are concerned that God couldn't love you, that God is angry with you, or that He wants to punish you as soon as he gets his hands on you, think again.

If you think that you have been too rebellious, run too far away, done too many wrong things, broken too many rules, or just feel that you are the wrong type of person for God to love, think again!

God feels about you like a father who has lost his child, like a parent of a runaway. His heart aches until he can see you coming back to him, then He is rejoicing. Not angry, not vengeful, just rejoicing, because you have come home.

Come home.

Come back to God,

See him waiting for you in the lookout tower, longing for you to be near him.

We all need to look at our lives and consider how far we have drifted. Sometimes it is just a little bit, sometimes we have wandered off to a foreign land. Sometimes we have said to God, "I wish you were dead!" and taken the reigns of our lives back again.

But God waits, He longs for you to come to your senses, and when you do, he is ready with his love, the new clothes and the celebration. Don't wander too far, and come back quickly. God is waiting with open arms.

I want to change your identity today. I want to challenge your identity as the unloved and too sinful. That is not how God sees you, and it is He who defines your identity because He made you. I want to change you from the wayward child, the unloved and uncertain to the surely loved by God, your loving father.

You have a new identity. God has defined who you are and what you are. The problem is that we see ourselves through our own eyes and the eyes of other people. We see ourselves through the closed eyes of sin, and not through God's eyes. God has created a new life for us, but it is much higher than the life we have invented for ourselves that we sometimes don't even see it. And so we struggle along in our self-imposed prison, while God is trying to wake us up to who we really are.

You are loved, you are wanted, you are cherished by your loving father who yearns to hold you close to him.