

Sunday Sermon June 17, 2018

Sermon Text: Luke 15: 11-32

Sermon Theme: God's Lesson of the Loving Father

1. A father who raises his children to know the Lord
2. A father who parents his children using the Word

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 men 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 men.' 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.

Pick almost any major sporting event baseball, football, basketball. The star has just made a big play or scored the winning points. The camera pans to them and they say, "Hi mom" or "Love you mom." Of all the countless hours of sporting events that I have watched I don't think I have ever heard one of these major athletes ever say, "Hi dad" or "Love you dad."

There are probably a lot of reasons why this happens. Maybe it's because child-rearing has been seen as primarily mom's job. Maybe it's because mom was the primary caregiver for them. But God never intended a father to be absent from raising his children. God always intended that fathers be a special blessing to his children. Today we will celebrate the very special blessing that God gives to us in a father. We thank God that we are blessed with fathers, grandfathers, step- fathers, adoptive fathers and all others who have stepped into that role of a father or father figure in our life.

In his Word, God gives us the blueprint for the family that includes, both mother and father as special blessings to each other and to their children. But more than that, he teaches us what a Christian father is supposed to be. In his Word, God shows us how he is the example of a loving, heavenly Father and he shows us Christian fathers can follow that same example and be a special blessing too.

Luke records for us a series of parables that Jesus told all with the same theme: God loves us and wants to forgive us. Jesus told these parables at a time when the Pharisees and religious teachers of the Jews were questioning what kind of Messiah God would send.

These religious teachers did not see God as a loving Father who would send a Messiah to forgive and give heaven. They saw God as a judge who would reward the good and destroy the evil. God's Messiah would be God's sheriff showing mercy to those that deserved it, while punishing those who deserved that.

Think about that picture of a Messiah for a minute. Is there really any comfort and peace in that kind of a God and Messiah? Maybe you are on the good side one day, but what happens if you do something wrong? What can always happen? The judge can change his mind from mercy to judgment in the blink of an eye.

What kind of names are associated with the greatest rulers of all time? Charles the Great, Ivan the Terrible, William the Conqueror, Attila the Hun. Many times the name that is associated with the ruler tells of their greatest achievement or what history will know them for. Out of all of the Old Testament names for God, out of all of the

ways that Jesus could use to describe God, he chose to reveal God in a way and with a name that shows a very personal and special relationship for most people. He chose to show that God is a loving father.

Jesus called God the Father many times in the New Testament to show the difference between the God that the Jews had been raised to know and the gods that others worshiped and feared and the how God actually was. Jesus told this set of parables, and especially this parable to show how much God loves us and wants to be merciful to us.

The parable that is our sermon text is a very well-known parable called the Lost Son, or the Prodigal Son. Many times we focus on the actions of the son. We see his impatience, his greed, his wild living. But many have said that this parable should really be called, The Love of the Father. That is what we will look at this morning.

Like many of Jesus' parables, this parable has many things that people can easily relate to. Maybe you are the parent whose child has made a bad decision, maybe you are the child who has made the bad decision and you have seen what it has done to your parents. Think back to the time when that decision was made. What were the problems that came because of that bad decision? How did mom or dad respond in the face of the bad decision or the fall-out of problems from it?

If making a poor decision and all of that trouble weren't enough, Jesus throws in a twist that would make it extra painful for parents.

Not only does the son want to strike out on his own, not only does the son want to leave his family behind, he does not get a job, or figure out how to do this on his own, he expects his father to fund his bad decision with his inheritance. This would be a terrible experience for any parent, but amazingly, the father gives him what he wants.

The son sets out and goes far away from home. He lives his life in an openly sinful way, squandering all that his father has given to him.

Put yourself in the shoes of the father again. Most families want to be close to one another, but think about the times when distance, time, or even problems get in the way of that closeness and separation begins to creep in. It hurts. Here is a father who has all of those things as problems. His son's arrogance has separated them, his son has moved far away and does not want to be near his father. The father may or may not have heard about how his son has been living. All of these things would hurt.

However, when the son finally realizes that he has sinned, when trouble has finally drained him of all of his arrogance and ego, all he has left is to apologize and beg for forgiveness. And when he does what happens?

It is here we see the kind of loving father our God is and what kind of father he wants us to be.

For us this would be an extremely awkward and painful experience. The father is hurt, the son is full of guilt. For many people, seeing each other after all this has gone on, would be extremely difficult. What should I say? What should I do? But it is not difficult for this father. This father runs with open arms to his son. He embraces him. With tears running down his face he kisses him. He throws what amounts to a forgiveness party in his honor saying, **he was dead but is alive again, he was lost and is found.**"

This is the father that the sinful, arrogant prodigal son needed and it is the one we need. Every day we show arrogance and selfishness. We demand that God give us our freedom. God does not argue with us or fight us. Instead, he allows us to see if our sinful way is better than his way. He allows us to see if our own thoughts and decisions are better than his.

What we find is the same as the son. Our sinful decisions often lead to worse problems. What seemed like a little lie to buy a few more minutes away from the kids turns into a big problem that hurts someone. What seemed like a small decision to do what I want to do, turned into my spouse being angry. What seemed like a little sin of greed, pride, or arrogance turned into something that caused grief, trouble, and sadness in the family for many years.

What happens when this trouble drains us of our arrogance and ego. What happens when all we have is sorrow, sin and misery? Then what do we do? We come to our loving heavenly Father for the forgiveness that he gives.

Our Father shows us the example of a truly loving father in forgiving us our sins. Our heavenly Father was willing to send his one and only Son to suffer and die to take away our sins. Now, through Jesus, our sins are forgiven and we are not lost children, we are children of God, adopted into his family and heirs of eternal life. Our heavenly Father opens his arms wide and says, "Come my children, you are loved."

This same unconditional love and forgiveness is what God wants all fathers to show to their children. There is a great blessing in being a Christian father and having a Christian father.

God has placed fathers into our lives to bring us closer to Jesus. In the parable, the father had taught his child the Lord's way. Even though his son sinned in his choices, when he finally saw his sin, he knew what it was and he knew that he needed to be forgiven.

In our reading from Deuteronomy, God tells us that his Word should be in our homes and lives as if we had Bibles written on our wrists. Parents, mothers and especially fathers, should take every opportunity to teach their children and lead them in the way of the Lord. Parents should lead children to Jesus through family devotion, church and Sunday School so that we will know the saving work of Jesus from an early age and so that it may stay with us throughout our lives.

My dad always told us, "I cannot make sure that you will have lots of things when I am gone. There won't be an inheritance of houses, or cars, or land to divide up, but I can give you something that is more important. I can make sure you know about Jesus so that you can always have the inheritance from God."

We see in this parable the great blessing that a father can be. A father can lead his family to Jesus and can show them the love and forgiveness of their Savior. Families need this, especially today. Children need a safe place where Jesus is lived and where godly love and forgiveness is shown because they may not get that anywhere else.

Children need to know that they can come to mom and dad and talk with them without the fear of temper, frustration, or sarcasm. They need to know that when they come in repentance that they will be forgiven.

Our God is our great heavenly Father, ready to love and forgive us. While we are here on earth, God wants earthly fathers to be a blessing to their families. He wants fathers to lead their families to Jesus and to model the same love and forgiveness that the heavenly Father shows.

This morning we thank God that he has given us fathers and father figures who are willing to be this Christ-like example. May God build up fathers to be those examples of love that he wants them to be. Amen.