

## **IX TRINITY 2015**

**SERMON – SAINT JOSEPH PARISH**

**FATHER CRAIG LOONEY**

***1 COR. 10.1 St. LUKE 15.1***

✠

A lost sheep...a lost coin...a lost son. Something or someone precious and valuable gets lost...and there is happiness and joy when that which was lost...is found.

The Parable of the Prodigal or Lost Son is the third part of a trilogy Jesus tells...with one clear message. "Prodigal" means "wastefully extravagant"...especially the waste of money. The Parable of the Lost Son is the quintessential story about Loss...and Redemption.

In the story the younger son goes to his father and asks for his inheritance. We normally receive an inheritance after someone dies and leaves us a bequest in the will. The younger son is selfish and doesn't want to wait. In asking his father for his inheritance...he is really saying, "Dad, let's pretend you are already dead".

Laws governing inheritance were as complex then as they are now. According to Jewish Law, the older son was entitled to a "double portion" of the inheritance. Upon the death of his father, the older brother would have received two-thirds of the estate...the younger brother would have received one third. But that's not how this story goes. It has twists and turns and a surprise ending.

The father doesn't argue with his younger son. He gives him what he wants. But, he divides the estate between his two sons...equally...and at the same time. The older brother gets his inheritance too. It's a twist in the story that would have shocked the law experts.

With his money in hand, the younger son sets out on what he thinks is going to be a great adventure, free of responsibility, free to live life on his own terms. But his newfound freedom is short-lived. He wastes all of his money living the high-life. In the end his inheritance becomes his downfall.

The young son in the story is in a far worse mess that he ever imagined possible. He has to go to work on a farm taking care of pigs. Jews considered pigs unclean. The younger son has three strikes against him: He has to

hang out with the pigs; he has to feed them; and he is so hungry he wishes he could eat pig food. It's a turn in the story that would have...well...turned the stomachs of the self-righteous lawyers hearing it from Jesus' mouth.

The process of Redemption for the younger son begins when he comes to his senses about the mess he has created for himself. His mistake is in thinking he is beyond even God's help. Certainly his father must hate him. And so he decides to return home and ask his father to put him to work and treat him like an employee, not a much loved son. Wrong!

His father sees his young son walking toward him from a distance. He runs to greet his lost son and filled with compassion...God's compassion...throws his arms around him and kisses him. He never gives his son a chance to finish his rehearsed speech. For the young son, forgiveness is something he didn't expect to receive. It is a joyful moment the older brother can't accept. Consumed by jealousy, he does not realize he has always had his father's love, just as his younger brother always had his father's love, even when he was lost.

We all like stories with happy endings. The Parable of the Lost Son is not so much a feel good story as it is a call to action. We know sin is a fact of life...sometimes we create messes for ourselves that leave us thinking we too are forever lost...to the point where we think even God can't help us. The surprise ending to the story is what it means for us today. There is a way out of the messes we create for ourselves.

Jesus teaches us through the Parable of the Lost Son there is nothing we can do that will cause God to disown us or disinherit us from his love. We can never commit a sin that is so terrible it will forever place us beyond God's reach. The process of Redemption for us begins when we admit our wrongdoing and start making changes in our lives.

When we find ourselves lost we can always begin the journey home, where our loving and compassionate Father waits to welcome us home with open arms.

And there will be joy and happiness at our return.

✠