

IX TRINITY 2018

SERMON – SAINT JOSEPH PARISH

FATHER CRAIG LOONEY

1 COR. 10.1-13 St. LUKE 15.11-32



Welcome to “Lost and Found” Sunday. In today’s Gospel...Jesus shows us how to find our way out of a spiritual “Lost and Found” department. He does this by using one of his favorite teaching tools...a short story...about a Lost Son.

Jesus is having lunch with some tax collectors and other social outcasts...and he gets criticized for reaching out to them. Jesus seizes on the opportunity to tell two stories we heard several weeks ago: one was about a farmer who lost and then found a sheep; the other was about a widow who lost and found a silver coin. The farmer and the widow were happy when they found what had been lost.

The story of the Prodigal or Lost Son forms a trilogy with the stories of the Lost Sheep and the Lost Coin. Jesus uses the three stories to teach us a fundamental truth about God...he is happy when we clean up our messes and return home to his loving care. We get the most out of the Story of the Lost Son when we take it at face value.

“Prodigal” means “wastefully extravagant” especially having to do with the waste of money. Think of someone who inherits a fortune or wins millions of dollars on the Lottery...then goes on a wild spending spree. Soon there is nothing left...things might be worse than before.

The Story of the Lost Son is the quintessential story about loss and redemption. It’s a story we should all relate to...we sometimes lose our way in life...we end up doing things we shouldn’t...ignoring the things we should be doing. We reach bottom and might even think things are hopeless. We feel trapped...and then discover there is a way out.

We know the story well...young son demands his inheritance from his father...ends up in foreign country...spends all of his money...when the country experiences a severe famine...is forced to go to work on a farm feeding pigs and cleaning up the pig sty. His life has bottomed out...he is convinced his only hope is to return home and beg his father for mercy.

The process of the younger son’s redemption commences when he comes to his senses and admits he has created his own mess. His error is in thinking his father doesn’t love him any more and has probably disowned him. He can only hope his father will take pity on him and put him to work on the farm as a hired hand.

We all like stories with happy endings and the Story of the Lost Son has one. The surprise waiting for the young son when he finally made it home...he never lost his father’s love...and it was more valuable than all the money he lost.

The surprise for us in the story...no matter how often we create messes in our lives...we can never lose God’s love...he will never disown us...he will never allow us to be tested beyond our ability to endure the test...he will show us the way out of our messes we create for ourselves...we just have to take the time to look...then take action.

We tend to focus our attention on the younger son in the story and identify with him. What about the older son? He criticizes his father for throwing an extravagant welcome home dinner for his younger brother. We might think he has a legitimate complaint against his dad. But his dad had also given the older son his inheritance...including love...God doesn’t withhold his love from anyone regardless of who they are or when they get their act in together.

From the dad’s perspective his younger son was lost...if not dead. His heart was filled with great joy when he sees his lost son walking toward him in the distance...the son he thought was dead...was alive again. How could he not celebrate his younger son’s return home?

Jesus looked for lost souls so he could save them. Jesus comes looking for us even when we think we are out of his reach. When we find ourselves lost we can always begin the journey home...where our loving and compassionate God waits to welcome us home with open arms.

We have a way out of the “Lost and Found” department...Jesus himself leads us to it...we just have to follow him.

