

IX TRINITY 2019

SERMON – SAINT JOSEPH PARISH

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

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Imagine what it would be like to be stranded in a foreign country with no job...no money...no food...no friends or family. The country is experiencing the worst drought in years...people are starving. That's what the young son in today's Gospel is facing.

The Parable of the Prodigal or Lost Son is the third part of a trilogy about something precious that gets lost...and the celebration that follows when it is found. We heard the first two parts of trilogy...the Lost Sheep and the Lost Coin...several weeks ago.

Prodigal, means *wasteful, extravagant, immoderate, excessive, reckless* and *self-indulgent*. All of these words describe a person obsessed with worldly pleasures without giving any thought to the consequences of his actions.

The story commences with the young son asking his dad for his inheritance. Instead of waiting for his dad to die and the reading of the will...the young son acts like his dad was already dead. The surprise element in this part of the story is what the father does...he divides the property equally between his two sons...the older brother gets his share at the same time as his younger brother.

After the young son sells his part of the property...he takes the money and runs...to a foreign country...where he wastes everything on extravagant living. There are numerous contemporary stories about people who have won millions of dollars in the lottery...only to spend everything they won and end up with nothing left...worse off than before.

The young son in the story is finally able to find work...feeding pigs. The surprise element in this part of the story...it's bad enough he had to be around pigs much less feed them...but he is hungry enough he wishes he had the pig's food to eat. He remembers how generous his dad was with the workers at home...they had more than enough to eat. What a mess he has gotten himself into!

Our Lost Son figures something has to change. Staying where he's at isn't an option. It's time to go home...only will he be welcome...what kind of reception will he get from his dad? Anything is better that what he has now...maybe he can work in his dad's fields like a hired hand. Maybe his dad will hate him for being disrespectful.

Our Lost Son has begun the road to Redemption but he makes the mistake of thinking he has hurt God and his dad so much and has gotten his life messed up so badly neither God nor his dad could possibly forgive him for being such a jerk. Understandable...maybe...but wrong!

It's a long journey home and the young son rehearses the speech he plans on giving his dad..."I'm no longer your son...treat me like a hired worker." Perhaps dad will put him to work in the fields. At least he wouldn't be starving. But there is another surprise element to the story.

His dad sees him far off in the distance and runs out to meet him. He doesn't give his young son time to deliver his speech...he throws his arms around him, kisses him, and instructs his workers to prepare a great feast...telling them, "My son was dead and alive again; he was lost but now he has been found."

What do we learn...about ourselves...from the Story of the Lost Son? Let's start with the times we have created messes in our lives and think there is no way out. Do we ever think the messes we have gotten ourselves into are so bad even God can't help us? Do we ever feel we have fallen so far down the rabbit hole we are lost forever? Surprise...there is a way out!

Like the stories of the Lost Sheep and the Lost Coin...the Story of the Lost Son is about loss and redemption. Sheep left on their own wander off and aren't smart enough to find their way home...coins don't have brains at all...both need someone to come looking for them. Both are precious to the owners...and there is a celebration when what was lost is found.

We sometimes lose our way in life. We can experience what we might think is permanent separation from God and others because we have placed ourselves in untenable situations. The point of the Story of the Lost Son is we are never so far beyond God's reach he can't find us or help us. We are always on his mind and in his loving care.

We come to our senses when we admit we messed up and the only way out of the mess is to start the journey home. God has an infinite capacity to forgive us and he welcomes us home with open arms. And he celebrates our return...because we who were dead are alive again...we who were lost have been found.

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