

# NEW BEGINNINGS LUTHERAN CHURCH

Fifth Sunday in Lent – April 6<sup>th</sup>, 2025 (11:11 am)

**LOST BUT FOUND**

Psalm 126

Isaiah 43:16-21

Philippians 3:4-14

**Luke 15:1-3; 11-32 (The Father)**

## **God's Beloved Son Has Redeemed Us**

Our life and works apart from Christ, no matter how they may glitter to the eyes of the world, are ultimately rubbish and have no righteousness. Rather, in the scandalous cross of Jesus, we find our righteousness alone *"through faith in Christ"* (Phil. 3:9). By such faith, we *"know him and the power of his resurrection"* (Phil. 3:10). For the same God who brought Israel out of Egypt has done a *"new thing"* for us in Christ Jesus (Is. 43:19). He has sent His beloved Son into His vineyard to be killed by sinful men and to become *"the stone that the builders rejected."* Yet, the One rejected by men *"has become the cornerstone"* of His Church (Luke 20:17). Through the waters of Holy Baptism, He provides us daily refreshment in our earthly pilgrimage, *"a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert"* (Is. 43:19).

In the parable of the Prodigal Son, Jesus presents a profound illustration of God's love for humanity through the figure of the father. The father in the story represents God, while the two sons symbolize different groups of people: the **younger son** represents sinners particularly Gentiles, and **the older son** represents sinners as well especial the religious leaders and those who view faith through the lens of righteousness and duty. The father's actions and emotions reveal God's heart towards the prodigal son and the old "righteous" son, both lost but found.

At one point in my life, I thought this parable was simply a description of how things work in this world, not in heaven. After all, in the parables of the lost sheep and the lost coin, Jesus speaks of angels rejoicing in heaven (Luke 15:7, 10). Yet, there is no such statement at the end of the parable of the lost son. Perhaps the celebration does not happen in heaven but only on earth, where we often have a **broken** sense of who deserves honour.

If we were to interpret the parable this way, the lesson would be: "Honour those who truly deserve it – those who are faithful, hardworking, and responsible. Do not celebrate the users and abusers until they have demonstrated responsibility."

However, this is not what happens in this parable. The two sons are lost, but the Father forgives, embraces and receives. The right title should be the Parable of the Beloved Father. That is the right interpretation of this parable.

## **A Father's Love for His Children**

The father had two sons, each with a different character. This reflects how every child is unique and how parents express love differently according to their children's needs. The father's unconditional love is evident—he accepts the younger son despite his mistakes and extends the same love and forgiveness to the older son, even when he struggles to understand his brother's return. As parents, we love our children equally, but we express it in ways that meet them where they are. One child might need words of encouragement, while another might need acts of service. The love is the same; the expression differs.

### **The Depth of Compassion**

In Jewish culture, *splagchnizomai* refers to deep, gut-level compassion that moves a person to action. It is more than sympathy — it is a love that compels intervention. In Matthew 9:36, Jesus sees the crowds and feels *splagchnizomai* for their lost state. This is the same compassion the father shows in the parable when he runs to his son, embracing him despite his past. It is a love that does not hesitate.

### **The Feast of Forgiveness**

“Bring the fattened calf and kill it” (Luke 15:22–23). This signifies the father's immense joy at his son's return. The fattened calf represents God's abundant grace and willingness to celebrate those who come back to Him, no matter how far they have wandered.

“**Let us eat and celebrate**” is not just a casual invitation — it is an expression of full restoration. The father does not scold or punish; he embraces and celebrates. This teaches us how we should respond to those who return to faith.

### **PARTIES ARE FOR THE LOST WHO ARE FOUND**

Notice that celebrations are never thrown for rebellious sinners who remain in their sin or for the self-righteous who refuse grace. The younger son only receives his celebration when he acknowledges his failure and returns to his father's love. Logically, the older son will receive his celebration as well—when he recognizes his own need for grace. Until then, it seems that he remains outside the feast.

### **DEATH PRECEDES RESURRECTION**

**The younger son was “dead and is alive again.” The older son, however, has yet to recognize his own deadness. But when he does, he too will experience new life.**

One day, I imagine Jesus looking at me with a half-smile and a twinkle in His eye, saying, “You have been faithful in a few things, I will make you faithful in many. Do I ever have an assignment for you! Come with me.” He will lead me to a secret door behind the throne. As I step through, my loved ones will jump out and shout, “SURPRISE! Welcome home!” Someone will place a robe on my back, shoes on my feet, and Jesus Himself will

hand me a glass of wine, smiling as He says, "Duty? Responsibilities? Service? There's none of that here. Now is the time to celebrate—you were dead and are alive again. You are at Eternal Home now. Enjoy it."

So, even if you and I do not get the celebration in this life, there is a heavenly feast waiting for us.

### **Living with Grace**

In the meantime, we do what only we can do. If that means serving faithfully, making wise choices, and living responsibly, that is wonderful. But we must not look down on those who struggle. Just as the father loved both sons equally, so does God love each of us unconditionally.

### **A Reminder to the Older Son**

The father tells the older son, "You are always with me."

Why do you live responsibly? Why do you strive to make wise choices? If you are honest, it is because you love God and desire to be with Him. And what does the father say? "You are always with me." Do you hear the tenderness? The love? The relationship?

## **WHAT THIS MEANS FOR US**

### **God's Running Love**

In Hebrew culture, fathers did not run—it was considered undignified. Yet, the father runs to his son the moment he sees him. This shows God's eagerness to restore relationships with those who return to Him. Imagine seeing your dog after it has been lost for days. You do not sit still—you run. This is how the father feels about his son: overjoyed, filled with compassion.

### **God's Unconditional Love**

No matter how far someone has strayed, God's love is unwavering. He is always ready to forgive and restore. This parable demonstrates that God's heart remains open, willing to embrace any who repent.

This message focuses on the father's unwavering love and compassion, particularly for the lost son who represents those who have strayed but are welcomed back. Just as the father rejoices in his son's return, so should we celebrate repentance and restoration in our lives and communities. We are called to reflect God's grace in our relationships, to be open to forgiveness, and to rejoice in the presence of our Heavenly Father whenever a lost soul is found.