

## **Wandering Away**

Parables of Jesus: Part 8 “Wandering Away”

Rev. Cameron D St. Michael – October 10, 2021

20<sup>th</sup> Sunday After Pentecost

**Readings:** Luke 15:11-24

**Reflection:** Psalm 25:1-10

**Greeting:** Lord, your word has been tried and tested. How we love your word and remember your precepts. Your instruction is true! Your commandments are our joy! Help me understand so I can live! Praise the Lord! (*Psalm 119*)

**Prayer:** Almighty God, the author of our lives. We yearn to hear the word that you have for us today. Help us to lift up our ears that we may hear you. Open our eyes that we may see you. Rest upon our hearts that we may experience your love more deeply so that we may share that love with the world. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

**Reflection:** Psalm 25

*To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul. O my God, in you I trust; do not let me be put to shame; do not let my enemies exult over me. Do not let those who wait for you be put to shame; let them be ashamed who are wantonly treacherous. Make me to know your ways, O Lord; teach me your paths. Lead me in your truth, and teach me, for you are the God of my salvation; for you I wait all day long. Be mindful of your mercy, O Lord, and of your steadfast love, for they have been from of old. Do not remember the sins of my youth or my transgressions; according to your steadfast love remember me, for your goodness' sake, O Lord! Good and upright is the Lord; therefore he instructs sinners in the way. He leads the humble in what is right, and teaches the humble his way. All the paths of the Lord are steadfast love and faithfulness, for those who keep his covenant and his decrees.*  
(*Psalm 25:1-10 NRSV\**)

We read the words of Psalm 25 and hear of trusting in God. That we should seek God to be saved. That God will guide us and lead us. That God's love is never far from us. That we follow God and hold to God's promise for us. In what ways do you exalt God in your life? How do you return to God when you've wandered away? How do you share the salvation that is offered to you to all people? How do you humble yourself before God? How do you reflect God's steadfast love? How can we share in the hope of Christ's redeeming grace?

**Prayer:** O God, teach us to listen more closely. Guide us in understanding your ways so that we may grow together in wisdom. Help us to return to you when we have gone astray. Help us to rest in our risen Savior. Hear our prayers on this day, raised up in Jesus' name, and show mercy to your children. May your Spirit guide us to peace and light everlasting. Amen.

Now let the words of our mouths, and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

**Sermon:**

Our scripture reading for today comes from the Common English Bible. Our reading for today comes from Luke chapter 15 verses 11 through 24.

*Jesus said, "A certain man had two sons. The younger son said to his father, 'Father, give me my share of the inheritance.' Then the father divided his estate between them. Soon afterward, the younger son gathered everything together and took a trip to a land far away. There, he wasted his wealth through extravagant living. "When he had used up his resources, a severe food shortage arose in that country and he began to be in need. He hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed pigs. He longed to eat his fill from what the pigs ate, but no one gave him anything. When he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired hands have more than enough food, but I'm starving to death! I will get up and go to my father, and say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I no longer deserve to be called your son. Take me on as one of your hired hands." ' So he got up and went to his father. "While he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was moved with compassion. His father ran to him, hugged him, and kissed him. Then his son said, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I no longer deserve to be called your son.' But the father said to his servants, 'Quickly, bring out the best robe and put it on him! Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet! Fetch the fattened calf and slaughter it. We must celebrate with feasting because this son of mine was dead and has come back to life! He was lost and is found!' And they began to celebrate.*  
(Luke 15:11-24 CEB+)

This is the word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God.

The first thing you might notice is that I have split this parable into two parts. And the reason being, I wanted to take a very close look at each son in this parable, because I think there's a whole story for each one. Now, in the reading we have for today we have a son who decides that he's heading out. And Jesus says that this son decides that he wants his inheritance and he's going to go. So, the father gives him his inheritance, divides it up between his sons, and the younger is on his way. Out living his best life, so he thinks. He goes to a faraway land, and he wastes everything he had. Soon, he's got to hire himself out and he starts longing for home. He starts thinking about home and goes, "You know what, that's where I should have been. I can go back and be a hired hand for my father. And he'll take me in." And he rehearses his lines. "Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I no longer deserve to be called your son. Take me on as one of your hired hands." He rehearses the line, and he gets it down pat. Before he gets home, his father spots him, runs to him, hugs and

kisses him, and the son gets out the first part of his prepared speech. "Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I no longer deserve to be called your son." But before he can finish his father calls for servants to bring out the best robe and put it on him, to put a ring on his finger, sandals on his feet, and he wants to fetch a fattened calf so that they can slaughter it for a feast. Because his son was dead and has now come back to life. He was lost and he is now found. And they celebrate.

Now of course there's more to this parable, but I wanted to look at just this younger son for today. Because his story by itself is a complete story. His story is one of many ways that we can get lost. And unlike some of the other parables we've talked about. I wanted to start with how I read this and the way I think Jesus presents this, and this will also play into how we read next week's reading, the second half of this parable. To me, this is a story about God's relationship with us. This son wanders away from where he should be, chasing after good times, chasing after what it is he thinks he wants. And I think we can all relate to him in this story, in some way. He's headstrong. He doesn't think he needs his father. He thinks he can manage on his own. We sometimes think we can manage without God. And it's only when he's away does he really stop to think about how good things were, how important that relationship was. He thinks, "gosh, my father took care of the people that were around him. If I hadn't wandered away, I would still be right there with them. Right where I should have been." And what we get is a parable about someone who wanders away from God and slowly finds his way back. Now we could just read this as a story of why it's important to repent, why it's important to always turn back to God, but there is another aspect to it that is just as important. Because this isn't just a story about somebody who goes, "I messed up and now I need to fix it." It's a story about somebody finding out they were always loved. Even when he wandered away. Even when he declared that his father was dead to him and all he wanted was the good things he could provide him to go do what he wanted. But there remained his father's love, God's love for us.

I think one of the most startling revelations that we get from this is that the father is there with open arms, joyous. It got me to thinking, is that what we expect from God? When we wander away from God, thinking that we know what's best for us, that we know everything we need to be doing, that we've got a handle on things. Why listen to God when there's so many things we could be out doing? So much fun we could be having? And one of the lessons we get is that the son comes back, ready to grovel, ready to beg for just a minor place. Just to work. Just be in his father's presence. Just to get what little might be afforded to him so he can live. How often, when we realize we've strayed, are we worried about coming back to God? Thinking that we're such miserable failures that God must have grown tired of our shenanigans by now. God must be sick of how silly we can be. That there's no way God is ready to say "no, you're still my child. You are still mine and I still love you." How often do we prepare our speeches, trying to get the words just right, hoping they will be the right words?

Something that this son learned from his wayward journey was something that he hadn't fully comprehended before. And that was his father's love. We could look at all sorts of aspects of this but the core that kept coming back to me was that he never would have left if he had understood how deep his father's love had been. He never would have demanded what he thought would be his, treated his father as if he were dead, wanting his inheritance, if he had just known. How often would we not stumble away, would we not wander away from the path because we think we know better? That we think we know the best path for ourselves, and we can take care of ourselves. How often do we forget how deep God's love is for us? And it raised an important question. How often do we underestimate God's grace, and love, and mercy for us? How often do we think that God must love us less because of the things we've done? How often do we turn away, so ashamed of ourselves that we're afraid to face our Heavenly Father, thinking we've gone a step too far and God must love us, a lot less than he used to? But the thing with this parable tells me is that God's love for us isn't fickle. It isn't fleeting. It doesn't depend on which way the wind is blowing. God's love for us is so deep that all he wants is for us to be near. To recognize that that love is there and that he is rejoicing when we come back. That there is joy when we turn back, when we stop wandering away. The story isn't about God being disappointed and wrathful, full of vengeance, upset over what we've done. It's about the joy of knowing we've come home.

Now this isn't the only way we get lost. But it's one of the ways that we stop depending on God to be there for us because we stop depending on that love, and we stop trusting in that love. And find ourselves wandering away from God. Next week we'll talk about what it's like to be lost, even in God's presence. And there'll be another exploration of under estimating God's love when we are stuck in place. But what I want to leave you with this week is this: in our parable, the father doesn't say "Where have you been? What have you done with everything I gave you? Why were you away so long?" The journey home, back into that loving home, isn't one filled with interrogation and scorn. But one of deep-seated love and joy for a child back where they belong. Back with the one who loves them so much that he would suffer death and humiliation on our behalf. Not to show us how pitiful we are, not to show us how much we've wandered away, but to remind us of how much we belong, because of how much we are loved. And we must ask ourselves the question: How well do we accept that love? How much do we trust in that love? How much do we embrace that love that God has shown us? How well do we know when we are truly home? Amen.

**Prayer of Confession and Pardon:** God of grace and glory, we thank you that you judge us not by the perfection of our actions, but by our readiness to live boldly by faith. Help us, as individuals and as a congregation, to trust you and follow where you lead, that in Christ your name may be glorified in all the earth. May we find forgiveness in your love. Amen.

**Offering:** If you are so moved to make an offering, you may send it to the church treasurer, or you may send it to the PO Box listed below. We are still the church, and the church still needs your support to keep doing all the important work that we do.

### **Lord's Prayer**

**Dismissal with Blessing:** May we go forth reflecting God's love in our lives as we go forth in the peace of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

## **Our Current Series – Parables of Jesus**

Our series is *Parables of Jesus* and will be looking at different parables that Jesus told. Each week I will ask that you read and reflect on the parable coming up. Feel free to discuss it with others or to get together to read and study. I would love to hear your reflections after the Sunday message!

October 17th – *Stuck In Place* – Luke 15:23-32

We take a look at the second of two lost brothers. The second is lost from being stuck in place.

### **Prayer List**

Rev Charliam Renner	Bishop Frank Beard	Our Conference	Our Healthcare Workers
Patti Corder and the Greenup	Ambulance Crew	Angie Veach	Eric Veach
Cathy Devall	Brock McMorris	Ed & Verna Titus	Henry Catey
Jake Kiser	Cindy Cisney	Nancy Hoke	Don Wells
Tricia Adkins	Don Stewart	Ronnie Winstead	Annie McMorris
Dwight Parsons	Lauren Stewart	Phyllis Gable	Sage Martin
Dalton McFarland	Darrell Quick	Ruth Ann Finley	Sandy Starwalt
Allen Goebel & Family	Jodie Bunch	Andie, Ed, Alex, & Katie Kulach	Richard Durham
Kathy Hanks	Wayne Carrell	Gary & Mary Winterrowd	Leo Smith
Bonnie Hite	Lavada Markwell	Greg Williams	Eloise Buffenmeyer
Martha Roberts	Charlie & Charlotte Baxter	Paul Schulte	Family of Herbert "Tip" Carlen
Family of Andy Shull	Family of Brent Pitcher	Family of Allan Dunne	Family of Bill Hayden
Gene Laymon	John Blade	Family of Emily Jobe	Family of John Kinzel

Rev Camron D St. Michael

<https://stmichael.pw>

[cdstmichael@outlook.com](mailto:cdstmichael@outlook.com)

(316)530-3182 (call or text)

PO Box 54, Charleston IL, 61920

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