

## **Stuck In Place**

Parables of Jesus: Part 9 “Stuck In Place”

Rev. Cameron D St.Michael – October 17, 2021

21<sup>st</sup> Sunday After Pentecost

**Readings:** Luke 15:23-32

**Reflection:** Psalm 105:1-11

**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 105

*O give thanks to the LORD, call on his name, make known his deeds among the peoples. Sing to him, sing praises to him; tell of all his wonderful works. Glory in his holy name; let the hearts of those who seek the LORD rejoice. Seek the LORD and his strength; seek his presence continually. Remember the wonderful works he has done, his miracles, and the judgments he has uttered, O offspring of his servant Abraham, children of Jacob, his chosen ones. He is the LORD our God; his judgments are in all the earth. He is mindful of his covenant forever, of the word that he commanded, for a thousand generations, the covenant that he made with Abraham, his sworn promise to Isaac, which he confirmed to Jacob as a statute, to Israel as an everlasting covenant, saying, “To you I will give the land of Canaan as your portion for an inheritance.” (Psalm 105:1-11 NRSV\*)*

We read the words of Psalm 105 and hear of God’s loving covenant. That we are continually in God’s presence. That we should rejoice because the Lord is with us. How do you experience God in your daily life? Do you take for granted the presence of the Lord in your life? Do you show dedication to God in what you do? How do you share with others how important God is in your life? 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 not underestimate your love and presence. 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 23 through 32.

*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. "Now his older son was in the field. Coming in from the field, he approached the house and heard music and dancing. He called one of the servants and asked what was going on. The servant replied, 'Your brother has arrived, and your father has slaughtered the fattened calf because he received his son back safe and sound.' Then the older son was furious and didn't want to enter in, but his father came out and begged him. He answered his father, 'Look, I've served you all these years, and I never disobeyed your instruction. Yet you've never given me as much as a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours returned, after gobbling up your estate on prostitutes, you slaughtered the fattened calf for him.' Then his father said, 'Son, you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. But we had to celebrate and be glad because this brother of yours was dead and is alive. He was lost and is found.'" (Luke 15:23-32 CEB+)*

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

We pick up again with our parable about the two sons. And this week we pick up after the celebration of the younger son returning home. This time we are going to focus on the older of the two sons and the ways that he has underestimated his father's love. Now in today's reading, we pick up with the father deciding that it is time to celebrate because the younger son has returned from his wayward journey and the older son is out working. What he's always doing. As he comes back from the field, he can hear music and dancing. When he asks the servants what's going on, and they explain about how his brother who had asked for his inheritance and left has returned. The older brother is not happy at all about his brother's return. And the father wants him to come in, to join in. But the oldest son is upset. He tells his father that he's never disobeyed him. He's always followed his father's lead. But now this younger son who did disobey, treated him like he was dead, comes back and suddenly he gets a feast. The father tries to explain that the older brother has always been with him. Everything that the older brother has, the father has. They share in it. But he's tried to instill the necessity to celebrate because the brother has returned. Because he's back home. Because he was lost to them and is now back. First, one might say this is just a response to the younger son. How can this be a story all by itself? What I noticed though, is that the older brother is also lost. But it's because he's stuck in place. It seems that when the younger brother left, he just carried on. Same as usual. No change in what he did. no change in how he behaved. No change in anything. He doesn't seem all that concerned with his younger brother, even referring to him as "your son" and not "my brother." And we might call this a "holier than thou" moment. He's the good one. Shouldn't he be the one that they're celebrating over? He's the good one. Shouldn't

he be the one rewarded? But what he has failed to notice is the back in the beginning of this parable, the father has divided the estate between his sons, the older getting his inheritance as well, now being shared with the father. All the resources for him to celebrate are already there. And the older son fails to see why this is such an important moment.

I would say that it's because he too has underestimated his father's love. Sure, he's been there in his father's presence, and he's been there with his father. But it seems that he hasn't understood the way that his father loves both of his sons. That had he been lost, there would be the same celebration because of the fact that he would have returned home. But it also says that he hasn't been willing to celebrate his father's love. He could have suggested it at any time that they celebrate the fact that they're there together. He could have suggested that they have a feast so that they too could celebrate his father's great love for him. But he's stuck. Because he's waiting for the father to celebrate him for being there. For doing the usual, never thinking that he has the power himself to celebrate. And for me, this stood out. Because when I really started to think about this, it meant that though he's now jealous of his younger brother being welcomed back home, he's never celebrated the fact that he is already there with his father. I found this interesting, because it gives us an idea of one of the other ways we can get lost. And you might say, "this other brother isn't lost. He's right there. How can we consider him to be lost when he never left?" And the answer is this: he's lost because he doesn't understand what he has. He hasn't taken the time to fully appreciate all that he has and all that is there for him. He hasn't taken the time to appreciate all the good things that he has. And by taking his father's love for granted, he stopped thinking about how good things are.

One of the ways that we can look at this is to think about the things that he hasn't experienced that makes him so disappointed. He's upset because his brother went out and wasted all that he had. And he judges his younger brother and then judges his father for wanting to celebrate his return. But the older brother has never been hungry. He's always had plenty to eat. He hasn't had to worry about what he will do tomorrow. He hasn't had to worry about trying to get back into his father's good graces. He hasn't had to worry about how he's going to survive. There has been no famine for him. No shortage of food, no shortage of anything. It seems almost that because he's with his father, and his father has provided for him, he's oblivious to how good things are. And we relate this again to God's love for us. How often do we take things for granted? That when things are going well, the only thing we think about is how things could be even better. How often are we judgmental of those who have been lost? How often do we sit from a seat where we have plenty and judge those that use what little they have to celebrate when they have cause to celebrate? I couldn't help but think that, at any time, all the resources were there. The food, the family, the friendship. The older son had the choice to celebrate the situation he was in with his father. The inheritance had been divided up between the siblings. He had his father's love, he had a fattened calf, he had the resources if he had wanted just to celebrate with his friends. But he was stuck in place waiting for somebody else to initiate the celebration. Why? Because he wasn't willing to take the initiative and

celebrate it himself. He didn't take the time to appreciate that he was in his father's presence, that his father's love was right there for him, that his father would be happy to celebrate with him.

I was reminded of something else that Jesus said. Jesus was there to save the lost. Not those who are already in God's presence because they're already saved. And we see that this son is lacking in the same kind of love his father has. We see him only paying attention to one of the two great commandments. And by only living out one of the two, it's hard to say that he is actually living either of them out. When he doesn't celebrate his brother, he doesn't want to celebrate and love his neighbor as himself. But in doing so, he shows that he hasn't taken the time to love God. And that was the big thing for me in splitting this parable into two.

Because of his good fortune, the older son is blind to the misfortune of others. Because he has always been in his father's presence, he has never thought about what it would mean to celebrate that presence as if he had missed it. Because he has always been in his father's care, he's never thought about how important that care is. Suddenly, it's about how he could have had more, and he feels left out. But the reason he feels left out is because he has excluded himself from the celebration. Because if he goes in, he would be celebrated as having a lost brother returned to him. Because he hasn't been able to fully comprehend his father's love for him, he's remained stuck in place. And for me, this speaks to the way that we get stuck in place. When we turn love into a routine without feeling. When we take God's love for granted, we stop celebrating it as something monumental and great in our lives and it becomes the usual. Then we expect God to step out and show us even more love to demonstrate that we are loved, not understanding how much we are already loved, and how much we already have. And when that happens, we stop appreciating all of the good things that we've got, how great things are when we are in our father's house. When God is with us, we don't have to worry. The older brother doesn't seem concerned about his father's love until his brother is shown that same love. And he becomes jealous of the fact that his father could love both of his sons equally. Even the one who had gone astray. And his complacency in that love has left him unable to understand the need to celebrate.

So, looking at this older brother we see that it's easy to grow complacent, thinking that because we're in God's care that we should have more and more and more. We may not celebrate the good things that we have right there with us in God's presence. Not until we see God's love being shown to somebody that we judge as being unworthy do we suddenly feel God's love is not enough. The older brother should be thankful that he's never had to go through those hardships, thankful that he's always had his father there with him to help him to guide him and lead him. To show him how to work, to show him how to live, so that he has no wants, and he has no need that has gone unfulfilled. It's only when he sees somebody receiving the love that he's already got that he gets upset. We have to be careful that we don't let ourselves become stuck in place in thinking of God's love as something that is just simply

there. But we must actively appreciate it and celebrate it. We must actively go out and say, "God is with me."

So let our love always be active. That when we love God, we think about how we can celebrate God and celebrate that we are with God. That we are in Christ, that Christ's love is there for us right now. And that when we experience it, it is something wonderful that we would love to experience with others, to know that they share in that love. Not demanding more just because somebody has received as much as we have. So that we can always be willing to celebrate those who are lost and then found. That we don't ourselves become lost, separated from the miracle that is God's love for us, because we have begun to treat that love as something mundane and ordinary. Let us always be looking for cause to celebrate. Whether it is that God has provided for us today or that God has returned a lost sheep of the fold back into our presence. Let us celebrate all aspects of God's love in our lives each and every day. 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 24th – *Lost and Found* – Luke 15:1-10

We take a look at a set of parables that look at the joy over those who have been lost who have been found again.

### **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	Family of John Blade	Family of Emily Jobe	Family of John Kinzel
Family of Karen Robinson		Family of Charlie Henderson	

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