

Luke 15:11-32

¹¹Jesus continued: “There was a man who had two sons. ¹²The younger one said to his father, ‘Father, give me my share of the estate.’ So he divided his property between them. ¹³“Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living. ¹⁴After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. ¹⁵So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. ¹⁶He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything.

¹⁷“When he came to his senses, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired men have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! ¹⁸I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. ¹⁹I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired men.’ ²⁰So he got up and went to his father.

“But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him. ²¹“The son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’ ²²“But the father said to his servants, ‘Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. ²³Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let’s have a feast and celebrate. ²⁴For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’ So they began to celebrate.

²⁵“Meanwhile, the older son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. ²⁶So he called one of the servants and asked him what was going on. ²⁷‘Your brother has come,’ he replied, ‘and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.’

²⁸“The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him. ²⁹But he answered his father, ‘Look! All these years I’ve been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. ³⁰But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!’ ³¹“‘My son,’ the father said, ‘you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. ³²But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’”

Dear children of God who once were lost and now are found,

Parents of all ages have always had a desire to watch over and protect their children. This is a natural part of being a parent. Parents don’t want anything bad to happen to their children and will do whatever is necessary to keep them safe and protected. Today’s parents have some new technologies to assist them. There are apps for their phones that track where their kids are at. There are programs that can track the activity of their children’s cell phones and their internet activity alerting them to bad and sometimes dangerous activities. Technology has come a long way in helping adults keep track of kids. It helps give

parents peace of mind because they can know where their kids are all the time and, even if something bad does happen, they'll be able to help pretty quickly.

Our parable for today talks about how our heavenly Father watches over his children and how he handles when a child has wandered off the track of faith. Our heavenly Father doesn't need an app or a computer program to watch over us. And yet, he knows our every thought, our every action and our every failing. While this may be disheartening to some of us, I think it is a great reminder that God not only watches over us as a concerned Father, he also forgives us when we have strayed and fallen short of his commands. This morning, let us ask ourselves the question:

Theme: How Much Does Our Heavenly Father Love Us?

- 1. He loves us when we are in the "mud of sin".**
- 2. He loves us enough to wash all our sins away.**

God is most certainly concerned for all of his spiritual children. You know the parable we're going through today. You've heard it. The story of the Lost Son. Jesus tells the story of a father with two sons. The younger son is a picture of all of us who have strayed from God and his grace. The father represents our Father in heaven. The younger one thinks he's man enough, good enough, responsible enough to go out on his own, asks for his share of the inheritance, and leaves. And his father just lets him. He doesn't follow him. He doesn't send an army of his best men to watch over his dear son. He doesn't give him an iPhone. The son thinks he's doing a good thing. The father knows he's not. But still, he just lets him go. Out there. By himself. All alone.

"Jesus continued: "There was a man who had two sons. The younger one said to his father, 'Father, give me my share of the estate.' So he divided his property between them. Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living. After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be need. So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything."

If, at some point before the younger son in our story left home, the father ever asked him if he would like the pods from the pig's pen for his dinner that evening, he quite possibly would have made a face similar to the one babies make when they are introduced to squash baby food – where they are thinking, "There's no way I'm ever going to eat that disgusting, detestable, wretched garbage!" And yet, just a short time later, we find this same young man sitting in the mud, upset, because no one would give him the disgusting pods the pigs were eating. Walking away from his father made something he once called "detestable, wretched garbage" appealing.

And that's a really good indicator of how you're doing with your heavenly Father. Do you find any garbage appealing? Maybe you can easily make a list of your favorite sins that are incredibly difficult to stop doing. Maybe you sit in the mud of lying, pornography, greed, hate, jealousy. Maybe you're arrogant or lazy. Maybe you are lax in your Church attendance or the studying of God's Word. And you know it's garbage, or, as the bible calls it, "sin," "trespass," "woe," "iniquity" and "transgression." But so far, it's garbage you haven't been able to get away from. Many times we're sitting in garbage, and we're not trying

to get out because, well, if you try to get out of the garbage, that means you have to, at least on some level, admit that you either got yourself into it or were foolish enough to let someone lead you there. And that's a hard thing to admit.

On a typical Sunday morning, we usually say something to the effect of, "I confess that I am by nature sinful and that I have disobeyed you in my thoughts, words and actions," which is really soft talk compared to how some passages in the bible describe us, basically as totally depraved and corrupt and fallen in total devotion to ourselves, and that even the good things we do are tainted with some kind of selfish motivation and so much sin that God really shouldn't, couldn't and doesn't love you for any one of them. Is that right? Is that what you say when you get down on your knees?

"Well, no, not exactly. That's not what *I* mean when I say that. Confession is good for the soul, right? Every once-in-a-while. Maybe just on Sunday, surrounded by 100's of others all saying the same thing. But really, I spend the rest of the week trying to prove the exact opposite. And I do a pretty good job. I work hard. I help people. I give some money away. I notice when people hurt. I ask the right questions. I look for answers. You don't have to tell me. I don't need a church to force me to say the words. I know I'm not perfect. But honestly, I could do better if I wanted."

"Honestly"? Is that an honest statement? Well, then ... why don't you? You say you can handle responsibility. You say you're ready. You believe you can take everything your Father has and do it as well as him. Then why don't you stop lust, craving, competing, pretending; cutting, hurting, despising, disappointing, thinking about someone other than yourself for more than a moment. You believe you can ... until you actually try. And your father knows. And he just lets you go, so that you can see for yourself that you're not exactly who you're supposed to be. You're *not* who you are *supposed* to be. When we look in the mirror, we shouldn't just feel unacceptable. To a God who lives in a high and holy place ... we are ... **"sinful from birth; from the time my mother conceived me." "I know that nothing good lives in me. I have the desire to do what's good, but I can't carry it out" successfully.**

Sitting in the mud, you realize that you could have had it so much better. Life could have been a lot easier, had you only stayed a bit closer to your father who somehow manages so much more than you ever will, gives it all away so freely, and holds it all together so easily. **"When he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired men had food to spare, and here I am starving to death! I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired men.' So he got up and went to his father."**

One of the things you hear in today's world is that you can't help some people until they hit "rock bottom". By this they mean that a person often times will not think that they need help, until their life has completely fallen apart. Often times when a person has hit rock bottom they realize that there is only one way to go and that is up and I need someone to help me out of this very deep pit. The son in the parable had hit rock bottom. His money was gone. He had no food and he realized that even his father's servants were in a better position than he was. He realized that he had messed things up completely and he realized that returning to his father was his only option.

As Christians what does this mean? One of the fastest growing mission fields for the WELS is our prison ministry. People who are in prison have often times reach rock bottom. They are often times very ready to hear about a God who has forgiven all their sins and will give them, strength and peace to move

forward. What about us? Have we realized our sins? Have we realized how far we have strayed from God's command **"to be perfect as he is perfect?"** Have we realized like the lost son of the parable that we have taken God's wonderful gift of love and mercy and have often times thrown it away for what? Some kind of temporary and earthly happiness? Have we realized that all too often we have covered ourselves in the mud of our sins and think that we look beautiful to our heavenly Father? This is where repentance comes in. What did the son do? He humbly returned to his Father and that is what we need to do regularly – return to our Heavenly Father.

"But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him. The son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' But the father said to his servants, 'Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' So they began to celebrate.

Wouldn't it be great to find a God who gives you reason to celebrate no matter what you've done. God doesn't let you go to send you away. He lets you go so you can see for yourself how great it is to have a Father who will never turn you away. Whether you're stuck in the mud of a sin despised by society or you're quietly struggling every day very privately, you have a Father who Isaiah says **"lives in a high and holy place, but also with him whose spirit is contrite and lowly;"** a Father who sees the weight of your heavy heart no matter how far off you've been and comes running with arms opened as wide as his whose hands had nail marks in them. **"He was pierced for my transgressions."** Meanwhile, I simply confess who I know I am and find a father who comes running to my defense as well as a friend who says, "Be of good cheer, your sins are forgiven." Amen