

‘A PARABLE OF SEARCHING, FINDING, BEING HUMBLE, FORGIVING, CELEBRATING,
REJOICING & LOVING’

4th Sunday Lent Year C – 31st March 2019

PARISH GROUPS REFLECTED

During the week parish groups reflected on today’s Gospel passage. These included the Men’s Group, The Ladies Prayer Group, the RCIA (Rite of Christian Initiation) group, those doing the Lenten Programs, and Year 5 Students at St Joseph’s.

WHAT TITLE WOULD YOU SUGGEST FOR THE PASSAGE?

- * HOW IS OUR PARISH COMMUNITY LIKE THE **YOUNGER SON**?
- * HOW IS OUR PARISH COMMUNITY LIKE THE **ELDER SON**?
- * HOW IS OUR PARISH COMMUNITY LIKE THE **FATHER**?

TITLE OF THE PARABLE

In Luke’s Gospel the parable does not have a title. Many are familiar with a popular title *‘The Prodigal Son’* However, this does not capture the whole passage.

Some have called it *‘The Parable of the Two Sons’* or *‘The Parable of the Father and Two Sons’*.

However, this might cause confusion with another much shorter parable, in Matthew’s Gospel 21:28-31 about a father, two sons and a vineyard. The father sends two sons into the vineyard. One says I will not go, but later changes his mind and goes, the other says ‘I go’ but doesn’t go;

The scripture scholar J. Jeremias named it *‘the parable of the Father’s love’*. Other suggested names have included *‘the parable of the merciful father’*, *‘the parable of the compassionate father’*.

You are now invited to read the Gospel passage, and after reflection, give it a name that speaks to you.

GOSPEL OF LUKE 15:1-3, 11-32

Now all the tax-collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to him. And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, ‘This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them.’

*So he told them this parable:
Then Jesus said, ‘There was a man who had two sons.
The younger of them said to his father,
“Father, give me the share of the property that will belong to me.”*

*So he divided his property between them.
A few days later the younger son gathered all he had
and travelled to a distant country,
and there he squandered his property in dissolute living.*

*When he had spent everything,
a severe famine took place throughout that country,
and he began to be in need.
So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country,
who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs.
He would gladly have filled himself with
the pods that the pigs were eating; and no one gave him anything.*

*But when he came to himself he said,
“How many of my father’s hired hands have bread enough and to spare,
but here I am dying of hunger!
I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him,
‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you;
I am no longer worthy to be called your son;
treat me like one of your hired hands.’
So he set off and went to his father.*

*But while he was still far off,
his father saw him and was filled with compassion;
he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him.*

*Then the son said to him,
“Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you;
I am no longer worthy to be called your son.”*

*But the father said to his slaves,
“Quickly, bring out a robe—the best one—and put it on him;
put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet.
And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate;
for this son of mine was dead and is alive again;
he was lost and is found!” And they began to celebrate.*

*Now his elder son was in the field;
and when he came and approached the house,
he heard music and dancing.
He called one of the slaves and asked what was going on.
He replied, “Your brother has come,
and your father has killed the fatted calf,
because he has got him back safe and sound.”
Then he became angry and refused to go in.*

His father came out and began to plead with him.

*But he answered his father,
"Listen! For all these years I have been working like a slave for you,
and I have never disobeyed your command;
yet you have never given me even a young goat
so that I might celebrate with my friends.
But when this son of yours came back,
who has devoured your property with prostitutes,
you killed the fatted calf for him!"*

*Then the father said to him,
"Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours.
But we had to celebrate and rejoice,
because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life;
he was lost and has been found."*

[pause to give the parable a title]

CONTEXT OF GOSPEL PASSAGE

In Chapter 15 of Luke's Gospel we hear:

In the parable of the Lost Sheep,
the shepherd **searches** in the wilderness until he **finds** the **lost** sheep.

In the parable of the Lost Coin,
the woman **searches** thoroughly around the house
until she **finds** her **lost** coin.

In the parable of the two lost sons:
The younger son is already returning home
when the father **runs** a distance to him.
The father **searches** for the older son who is nearby in the field.

After the finding of the sheep, the coin, the return of the younger son,
there are **celebrations**.

And the older son is invited back to the house for the celebration.

In context, we gather insights into
'**searching**', '**finding**', '**celebrating**', and '**rejoicing**'.

CONTRAST

Jesus used contrast at times in his parables and stories.

Earlier in Luke 7:41-42 a certain creditor had two debtors,
one owed 500 denarii, the other 50.

Jesus said,

*"When they could not pay,
he cancelled the debts for both of them.
Now which of them will love him more?"*

We see an insight into **forgiveness and love**.

Later in Luke 18:9-14 about the Pharisee & the Toll Collector
Jesus says,

**“for all who exalt themselves will be humbled,
but all who humble themselves will be exalted”**

We gain an insight into **humility**.

Just as it is helpful to see today’s parable in context
with the lost sheep and the lost coin,
so also it can be helpful to remember the parables
of the creditor and two debtors,
and the Pharisee and the Toll Collector.

THE FATHER

Who is the central character of the parable? The father.

We gain an insight by the father’s words to both sons.

The father says to his servants about the younger son:

*“let us eat and celebrate;
for this son of mine was dead and is alive again;
he was lost and is found!” And they began to celebrate.”*

The son is alive again, in the father’s presence.

The father says to the elder son,

*“Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours.
But we had to celebrate and rejoice,
because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life;
he was lost and has been found.”*

YOUNGER SON

The younger son has wasted so much.

He has hit rock bottom.

He is desperate, his motives are not perfect.

He plans his response, to admit his sin against heaven and against his father,
so that he can get a job as a hired hand.

All the pain and disappointment that he has caused his father and brother.

In fact, he is not yet aware of the depth of his **sin**
against the love of God and family for him.

It is all about him. Yet he turns towards home,
and is still far off when the father sees him and **runs** to greet him.

The father is **moved, filled with compassion**.

The father takes the initiative – to show his love.

This translates the Greek word here for the bowels being moved.

So much compassion that the body feels it.

The depth of love is with the father, so full of mercy and love.
The father embraces him and kisses him.
The father calls for the best robe, a ring and sandals, a fatted calf for his son.
The father is celebrating.

CAN WE SHOW SUCH A DEPTH OF LOVE AND MERCY TO OTHERS?
HOW DO WE HONOUR SOMEONE WHO HAS OFFENDED US SO MUCH?
DO WE CELEBRATE SOMEONE'S RETURN, EVEN IF THE OFFENDER IS NOT PERFECT?

OLDER SON

The older son is resentful.
The older son says "*that son of yours*",
he doesn't say "my brother"

He is jealous of the father's love for the lost son.
How resentful? With a huge chip on his shoulder.
He refuses to be part of the father's joy.
And yes, he thinks it is all about him.
He has been loyal **but**.
The father comes out to search for the older son, who is not far away.
He invites him to come and celebrate and rejoice.

GOD AT THE CENTRE OF OUR LIVES

Both sons are selfish in different ways.
We can often be tempted to think
that our lives are about ourselves, about our stories,
about our autobiographies, about our successes, about our achievements.
Whereas we are invited,
humbly to place God at the very centre of our lives.

We are called to place God, not ourselves,
at the very centre of the local parish community.
We, as individuals and as faith communities,
are called to place God at the very centre.

It is the father in the parable who runs to the younger son
and welcomes him so graciously.
It is the father who notes the elder son is missing
and goes out to find him and to invite him into the celebration.

HOW DID THE FATHER FEEL WHEN THE YOUNGER SON WANTED TO LEAVE?
HOW DID THE FATHER FEEL WHILE THE SON WAS AWAY?

HOW DID THE FATHER FEEL ABOUT THE ELDER SON WHO STAYED,
AND WORKED WITH HIM, LIVED IN THE FATHER'S PRESENCE,
AND CELEBRATED IN THE USUAL JEWISH RELIGIOUS WAY,
THE WEEKLY SABBATH AND THE ANNUAL THE PASSOVER?

WHAT DID THE FATHER SEE IN THE ELDER SON'S ATTITUDES, HIS SILENCES?

HOW WERE BOTH SONS LOST, IN DIFFERENT WAYS?

There is so much we are not told.
We fill in the details according to our own lives.

AS WE ARE LIKE THE YOUNGER SON, DO WE STAY AFTER THE CELEBRATION?
AS WE ARE LIKE THE OLDER SON, DO WE GO JOIN THE CELEBRATION?

WILL THE YOUNGER BROTHER APOLOGIZE TO HIS BROTHER?
WILL THE OLDER BROTHER LET GO OF HIS RESENTMENT, AND BE GRACIOUS TO HIS BROTHER?

HOW WILL THE YOUNGER BROTHER OVERCOME ANY GUILT TOWARDS HIS BROTHER?
HOW WILL THE OLDER BROTHER FORGIVE HIS BROTHER?
WILL BOTH BROTHERS LEARN TO TRUST EACH OTHER?

They do not have to do this alone.
The father is there to help them individually and together.
The father is the centre.

SPACE

DO WE ALSO NOTE THAT THE FATHER GAVE BOTH SONS THEIR SPACE?
AND WAITED FOR THEM TO ASK?

Sometimes we can be tempted to forget that
we haven't asked God for something
and then we blame God for not giving it to us.
The older son said to the father,
*'yet you have never given me even a young goat
so that I might celebrate with my friends'*
The older son hasn't asked.

Can we really believe that the father would not have graciously responded?
God gives us space in our lives. Space to grow.
Space to come to realize that we need to recognize God at the centre of life.

WE FILL IN THE STORY

What have been the attitudes of the older son while his brother has been away?
We can fill in the story from our life experiences.
What have been the attitudes of the young son who had gone away from the father?
We can fill in the story from our life experiences.

In this parable, we are invited not only to hear and to listen.
We are invited into the parable.

THANK YOU TO OUR PARISH GROUPS:

* LADIES PRAYER GROUP

Thank you to the Ladies Prayer Group who, on Wednesday morning, reflected on this Gospel.

And for your insights as individuals, family members and parish members.

They gave examples of how, at times, we can be like both sons and the father, all in one day or one week.

They spoke of the need to keep going back to the scriptures.

They named some of the ways the church excludes others by putting up barriers.

And that a duty mentality like the elder son doesn't fulfill us, it is the love and compassion of God that fulfills us.

Thank you for all the insights you shared.

* RCIA (RITE OF CHRISTIAN INITIATION OF ADULTS)

Thank you to the RCIA Group on Wednesday evening for your insights.

They discussed how the core of the parable is about love, not property, not possessions.

Thank you for all the insights you shared.

* YEAR 5, ST. JOSEPH'S PRIMARY SCHOOL

Thank you to the Year Fives who reflected on this parable during Mass on Friday.

After briefly naming ways in which

they can be like the younger son and the older son,

they then reflected on how they can be like

the father to their younger Buddies at school

and to their younger sisters and brothers at home.

OURSELVES

DO WE EVER TAKE THE TIME TO PONDER THE INCREDIBLE RICHNESS OF GOD'S LOVE?
OR ARE WE TOO BUSY WITH EVERYTHING HAVING TO BE ABOUT US?

ARE WE LIKE THE YOUNGER SON, WASTING OUR OPPORTUNITIES,
AND BEING SELFISH AND COMPLETELY SELF-ABSORBED, IMPERFECT IN OUR MOTIVES?

ARE WE LIKE THE OLDER SON WHO HAS BEEN DUTIFUL TO THE FATHER,
THOUGH HIS JEALOUSY, RESENTMENT AND SELF-RIGHTEOUSNESS BLIND HIM?

ARE WE LIKE BOTH SONS?
WHY DO WE PUT UP SUCH BARRIERS TO GOD'S LOVE?

Yet God still loves us and invites us to change.
We don't have to do it all by ourselves – God will show us how.

HOW OFTEN DO WE THANK GOD?

The father says, *'All I have is yours.'*

We have pondered in what ways,
we are like the younger and older sons and the father,
Let us pray that over this Lent,
we take down any barriers to the love of God,
and celebrate and rejoice in God.

Amen

Fr. Gerry

[Readings: <http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/033119-yearc.cfm>]

[Parish Facebook: <http://bit.ly/parishFacebook31032019>]

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