



PARABLES TO PEOPLE

Yours, Mine, and Ours

February 11, 2024

[Worship Music Playlist](#)

Prelude – Leaning on the Everlasting Arms by Traditional

WELCOME (cards & community) |

Good morning, all! I'm so glad we can gather together this morning as the church. **To come together on this day made for us, a day where we awoke into the light of our Father's completed work.** A day to rest in God with us, God for us. It is a day to set our mind's attention and heart's affection upon Jesus, our Light, and Life so that we might be the church, spiritual companions in the gospel community, following Jesus together in our ordinary roles and relationships. To be the church, that's the aim of our worship together, remembering whose and who we are in Jesus. So, for those new with us, we are glad you're here, and **we'd like to invite you to church, into the relationships that make the church indeed a faith family through Jesus.**

We'd also like to invite you to rest with us in the work of Jesus, to plead again this day for God to do again what He does, and lead us once more into life whole and holy, full and forever with Him and for the good of all those caught up in His presence and purpose, His kingdom. **Will you pray with me?**

CALL TO WORSHIP | Psalm 126

It seemed like a dream, too good to be true, when God *returned* Zion's exiles. We laughed, we sang, we couldn't believe our good fortune. We were the talk of the nations— "God was wonderful to them!" God *was* wonderful to us; we are one happy people. **And now, God, do it again—** bring rains to our drought-stricken lives, So those who planted their crops in despair will shout hurrahs at the harvest, So those who went off with heavy hearts will *come home* laughing, with armloads of blessing.

SONG #1 – No Limit to Your Love by John Van Deusen

SONG #2 - Psalm 126 by Bifrost Arts

Dismiss Kids

CALL BACK & ANNOUNCEMENTS | Entering Awareness & Picking Up Where We Left Off

We all fail to relate to things, responsibilities, and especially people rightly. Most of the time, it is not for a lack of desire. We want to do well, but our response is less than ideal when elevated moments arrive in opportunities, frustrations, conflicts, or crossroads. We assume that because we love Jesus, our families, our coworkers, etc., we will always react best for them and us. But we don't.

Entering Awareness [SLIDE] is five small-group conversations designed to help us uncover the anxious beliefs that undermine our day-to-day, in-real-relationships faith in Christ. These aren't the beliefs we express in a creed or discuss with our faith families. These anxious beliefs are more subversive. They prefer to hide out in our nervous system than get noticed in all the ideas and desires we keep in our minds. And there, underneath the surface, these anxious beliefs feed us a story about what is going on in the world, what we need to be okay, and who or what we need to turn to get what we need. Unchecked, these false stories fuel chronic anxiety in each of us that causes us to react to situations and people in ways that later leave us confused and ashamed. Fortunately, we can find, expose, and become aware of our anxious beliefs in the moments most affecting us: our reactions to others. We can all learn to notice how our chronic anxiety takes over, like watching a rookie poker player with a lousy tell. This five-week group is for those who want to be more aware of their chronic anxiety so they can learn to, by God's grace, manage those lies instead of being managed by them. **So sign up today!**

Because, well, the truth is, as the psalmist said and our story reported last week,

We all arrive at your doorstep sooner or later, loaded with guilt, Our sins too much for us— but you get rid of them once and for all, you atone for our transgressions. Blessed is the one you choose and bring near, to dwell in your courts! We shall be satisfied with the goodness of your house, the holiness of your temple! By awesome deeds you answer us with righteousness, O God of our salvation...(Psalm 65:2-5)

We all find ourselves in need of God's answer in awesome deeds, in His saving actions, His righteousness so that we might live rightly (whole, full, and forever) with Him, ourselves, one another, in our vocations and in our physical place. This movement toward our need and meeting our greatest, most fundamental need is the journey of *Lent*. A journey that we, along with nearly a billion fellow Jesus followers, will set out on in the days ahead.

Yet, it is not a journey to take lightly. Any movement towards the cross and tomb, even if the tomb is empty, will stretch us, conform us, and invite us into death of the old and resurrection of the new. And so, the Orthodox Church has, from the first centuries of our faith, spent the Sunday's leading up to Lent as preparation for this journey of "bright sadness," our movement towards cross and tomb to Easter morning.

So, in line with our Orthodox brothers and sisters, our faith family will take some time to prepare for Lent as well, moving from parables to people along an orthodox path, **from stories to relationships**, so that our hearts are readied for the home stretch and, even more so, for being brought home and living there with Christ alive.

Pray with me.

PRE-SERMON READING | Luke 15:11-32

And he said, "There was a man who had two sons. And the younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of property that is coming to me.' And he divided his property between them. Not many days later, the younger son gathered all he had and took a journey into a far country, and there he squandered his property in reckless living. And when he had spent everything, a severe famine arose in 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 into his fields to feed pigs. And he was longing to be fed with the pods that the pigs ate, and no one gave him anything. "But when he came to himself, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have more than enough bread, but I perish here with hunger! I will arise 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 as one of your hired servants.'" 'And he arose and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. And 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 servants, 'Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet. And bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate. For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.' And they began to celebrate. "Now his older son was in the field, and as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing. And he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant. And he said to him, 'Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fattened calf, because he has received him back safe and sound.' But he was angry and refused to go in. His father came out and entreated him, but he answered his father, 'Look, these many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command, yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him!' And he said to him, 'Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. It was fitting to celebrate and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found.' "

SERMON |

The movement towards the events of Easter, towards the cross and grave and empty tomb, is inevitably where we all arrive; whether we name the journey or recognize the markers or not. *Lent* is just the intentional undertaking of the journey in that direction. Inevitably, the road for each of us is to our place of neediness. A place when we finally arrive there, we feel it in our whole being and reach out to satisfy it, whether in plans or demands or distractions. Yet, as our story tells us, all that is actually required of us is to receive in need what is offered *for* us.

"For hundreds of years, the Latin tradition has called this parable *Evangelium in Evangelio* (the gospel within the gospel)..."¹ The longtime Middle Eastern resident and Arabic and Syriac scholar Kenneth Bailey contends that in this gospel within the gospel, "Jesus takes the great saga of Jacob [the origin story of Israel becoming *Israel*, contenders with God and men] and reflects it in a new story composed of himself at the center."² In other words, this parable is the first listeners story and ours, *the* story of our faith and everyone's faith. **For ultimately, it is a story about relationships;** how we relate to God, our creator and savior, and one another, and even the things (our vocations and place in which we make a life). In other words, it is about *righteousness*, our pursuit of it, and once again, where, when, and how it is found and enjoyed...or missed. Let me see if I can help us see that.

¹ Kenneth E. Bailey, *Jacob & The Prodigal: how Jesus retold Israel's story*, 13.

² *Ibid.*

Now, I am sure most of us are acquainted with the parable of the Prodigal Son; it is, after all, one the more widely known parables even outside of our faith. Verses one and two of chapter 15 give us the context that drew this story out of Jesus,

Now the tax collectors (traitors) and sinners were drawing near to hear Jesus. And the Pharisees (the devout) and the scribes (the learned) grumbled, saying, 'This man receives sinners and eats with them.'

To eat with someone at this time in history is to show them honor. In some way, to affirm that they are honorable people. So, to honor the traitor and those by their public living who were opposed to God's holiness is to dishonor those loyal to the land and the temple.

Jesus' response to the mutterings is not an argument but a cascade of parables, starting in 15:3 and running through 16:8 **that show the place of sinners in the kingdom.** This afternoon, we will look at the parable that I think helps us best comprehend our universal and persistent problem as sinners, and know most explicitly our once-and-for-all solution. So, let's talk about the story.

What do we know right from the start in verse 11? It is a story with two sons (so it can't be all about the prodigal) and their father, and the quiet community that is presumed in the telling. And here is what we know about these relations:

We know that the younger son has a broken relationship with his father. In verse 12, the younger son says, 'Father, give me the share of property that is coming to me,' which essentially is saying, "I wish you were dead, and I wish to live as if you are dead."

Everyone listening to Jesus' story would have gasped at the arrogant and offensive statement. Such a request from a child to a healthy, living parent would not have been acceptable. Still, beyond the mere social and emotional insensitivity, the law also forbids such action. A son could not demand his inheritance while his father lived. This law partly protected the parent from greedy children who might try to strong-arm their way into what was not yet theirs. But also, it was expected that a child should care for his parents, and part of the way of doing so was taking responsibility for what was the parent's and would be the children's *only after* the parent's passing (mature through stewardship). And so, the younger son's demand to live his life without his father, on his own, with the proceeds of his father's life—was a slap across the father's face and a disregard for the rules governing community life at that time.

Speaking of **the community**, the silent cast along the edges of the scene would be infuriated with the younger brother. Especially in a first-century village or town, word of the younger brother's insolence would have spread like wildfire. The community would have expected the father to return the slap from the youngest son, to deny him his offensive demand, and punish him for it.

We also know that the younger brother's relationship with his older brother was strained. The oldest son would have been expected to rebuke his younger brother for his haughty or hateful entitlement. Assuming the little brother responded with anything other than contrition, the older brother would have been expected to do all he could to broker peace between the divided parties. It was his responsibility to be the agent of reconciliation. In our story, the older brother neither rebukes nor attempts to reconcile. He, too, it seems, has issues with his father and also with his younger brother. Jesus knew relating to others is messy business!

The anger of his relatives and neighbors is one reason the younger son gets out of town so quickly. In order to take advantage of his newly acquired resources and freedom, he needs to get away from those who, at every turn, would have reminded him of the shame of his actions and limited his profitability. For you see, no one would buy the family's property from him or work for him, having committed such shameful and illegal acts. So, for the son to have received something, the father would have had to call in his debts, sell certain portions and possessions, and remove resources from the banking-like structures of the day, all of which would have exposed the community to the truth of the son's desire. The community's displeasure with the youngest son would only escalate when he returned exhausted of these resources, ensuring the loss of the communal and family heritage and abandoning his legal responsibility to care for his father in old age.

No one then, and only a few now (if we're honest), would have expected the father to grant the son's demand for his life. For, as one scholar notes, **"the father, in effect, commits suicide."**³ The son has effectively told his dad to "drop dead legally," which is what the father does. The father's complying with his son's demands is an act of humiliation so that he can **provide his son with the "living" he requests. For the son's "life...substance...and being," as it reads in Greek, the father character has to give up what is rightly and only his.** And so, the father character has to look like a fool to the community and probably his older son.

The son takes the father's life and squanders it in reckless living (v. 13), that is, living without a long-term plan, without a more significant, eternal perspective, and thus, foolishly.

Finding himself in a hole of his own making, the son comes to his senses, wises up, and remembers the life of even the least under his father's care. So he makes a plan. That's what it says in verses 17-19,

But **when he came to himself**, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have more than enough bread, but I perish here with hunger! I will arise 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 as one of your hired servants.**"

He had a plan to admit that he was not the wisest decision-maker, nor had he led a "perfect" life, but if given a chance, he could work his way up from the bottom and maybe, just maybe, continue to benefit from his father's existence. His solution is fixed, then! He'll apologize to his father for squandering the property and resources and set in motion a plan—albeit with a bit of help from the father character—to make right what was wronged. And so, belly aching for fulfillment, the younger son turns toward home. The only problem is the villagers.

"He left, having offended the entire community. Now, he has lost the money to the gentiles [of all people]. **Thus, he can fully expect the extended family to cut him off...His entry into the village will be humiliating and ruthless as the pent-up hostilities of the villagers are vented on him for having insulted his father, sold the land, and now lost it.** For this problem, the youngest son apparently has no solutions."⁴ The village will simply have to be faced."⁵ **His cross to bear, as it were. Every sin has its price to pay, every mistake its consequences, and the anger and despise of the village will be his.**

In summary, the prodigal "plans to live in the village as a hired servant. With such a position, his status will be secure [as a free man]. He can perhaps fulfill his responsibilities to his father, and the problem of his relationship with his

³ Robert Capon, *Kingdom, Grace, Judgement: paradox, outrage, and vindication in the parables of Jesus*, 294.

⁴ Kenneth E. Bailey, *Poet & Peasant*, 177-178.

⁵ *Ibid.*

brother is eliminated [via avoidance]. The village, with its mockery, will have to be faced. **He will have to pay this bitter price to get home.** He must get home, however, because he is starving.”⁶

The younger son’s repentance (that returning home in the stories preceding), it seems, was work done to earn favor, in this case, the father’s support for daily living so that he could continue to live the life he wanted—at a distance, but with plenty of food.

The common belief at the time, especially amongst the Pharisees and scribes⁷, was to regard **repentance as atonement for sin**. The prodigal messed up and wanted it made right for his benefit: the stopping of the difficulty and starvation, the filling of the emptiness. But he was making the effort, making the plan, making the vow. Doing the respectable and religiously acceptable thing. He would confess the wrong and make things right, at least right enough.

How often are our acts of repentance similar? We turn towards our Father, admit our sin, the area we screwed up and squandered, and make a plan for restitution on our terms. Willingly paying the price we feel is necessary to relieve the angst of our current situation, to fill the longing and aches of life in another kingdom.

The prodigal knows all those who have never made a mistake, never tried and failed, always played it safe, did the “right thing” will judge him, but what else can he do? Where else can he go? So he keeps walking. But, unbeknownst to the son, the father character is watching for him. And, once again, he does something unexpectedly humiliating; *he runs*.

A man in the first century, much more so a nobleman of wealth and position, which indeed the father character was, would never run in public. Such action is absolutely humiliating, socially unacceptable, and shocking behavior. Notice this: The father does not just run to the entrance of his estate but runs across the entire village so that everyone would see him running and **behold his humiliation**.

“What the father does,” argues one scholar, “in the homecoming scene can best be understood as **a series of dramatic actions (“awesome deeds of righteousness, making right) calculated to protect his boy from the hostility of the village and to restore him to fellowship within the community.”**

The first three dramatic actions are done without the son doing or saying anything:

"By awesome deeds you answer us with righteousness...our salvation! "

- **First, the father runs!**
- **Second, the father embraces the son**
- **Lastly, the father kisses the son**

- **First, the father runs!**
- **Second, the father embraces the son**—making the reunion public on the edge of the village, ensuring that everyone can see the son is accepted and under the father’s care. There is no doubting the heart or intention of the father.
- **Lastly, the father kisses the son**—a sign of reconciliation and forgiveness, something the son was expected to do when he saw his father, yet the father does it first!

⁶ Ibid., 179.

⁷ Ibid., 180.

The son, “Rather than experiencing the ruthless hostility he deserves and anticipates, witnesses an unexpected, visible demonstration of **love in humiliation**. The father’s acts replace speech. There are no words of acceptance and welcome. **The love expressed is too profound for words. Only acts [or making right] will do.**”⁸

And in the light of the father's humiliation, the son can only say, “I am unworthy.” Look at verse 21. The son offers no plan for restitution or atonement or repayment; he simply recognizes the father character's true nature and the desire he had for his son all along and waiting for him; and confesses he hasn't lived up to such a relationship.

The younger son missed the father’s humiliation the first time around in obliging the son’s demand. But he couldn’t miss it here in the open, doing for him what he should have but could not do himself—dying for his sake.

And the father does not just continue his humiliation for the son. The father ensures that the prodigal rises from his lowly heart to a place of honor by:

"By awesome deeds you answer us with righteousness...our salvation! "

- **Telling the servants to dress the son**
- **The father then gives the best**
- **The father also gives the son shoes**
- **Lastly, the father gives the fatted calf.**

- **Telling the servants to dress the son**, making sure the servants—and the son—know his place in the home.
- **The father then gives the best robe**, the father’s own robe, so as the guests arrive at the banquet, they will know right away that the son is restored, letting there be no doubt of the fullness of the restoration.
- **The father gives the son a signet ring**, which means the son is to be entrusted with the responsibilities of sonship, the very responsibilities he abandoned!
- **The father also gives the son shoes**, a sign of *being a free man in* the house. He is bound by the relationship, by love, not by debt.
- **Lastly, the father gives the fatted calf**, which means the entire village will join the two of them in celebration, ensuring the complete restoration of the son back home.

In the end, the son got everything he was really after—freedom, honor, family, welcome—but only after the father character endured the son’s humiliating actions and humiliated himself, even dying legally for him.

And that would be great if the story stopped there, but remember, this father character has two sons. **The youngest squandered the father’s life given for him with reckless living, and the older, well, he lived just as foolishly.**

Remember what **verse 12** said,

“And the father divided the property (the “living” the “substance”) between **them.**”

⁸ Ibid., 183.

Both sons got what they wanted, what they desired. Free life from one another and their father when what was the father character's became theirs. The younger son ran with his portion and ran it into oblivion. The older son stayed and kept trying to earn it! What a fool!

The older son was not living as a steward “bless-ed” because of what was already his, but living instead as a bitter servant. Listen to his whining in verses 28-30:

“father, I served you all this time, and you didn’t give me even a young goat, much less a fatted calf to share with my buddies, much less the entire community. But you let this one who wasted it on things too improper to think about, come home without recompense, and you celebrate it!”

The son’s issue concerns his father, not just his little brother. **Why is he frustrated? What would make him feel like he did and accuse his father of such unexpressive love or affirmation? Why would he stay outside?**

Speaking of being outside, we see the father once again humiliate himself. The fact that his oldest son was not at the party would have been enough to get the social gossip mill working—again. The fact that the eldest son was seen outside, pouting and refusing to enter, was once again a mark of humiliation upon the father. Nevertheless, **the father does the socially unacceptable and surprising; he leaves the party.** He steps away from the celebration and steps outside, not to demand the son’s compliance but to entreat him—to beg him, up close and personal, not to miss out on what is happening.

To this son’s offensive and blind accusation, the father responds with an enlightening statement,

“Son, you are always with me (never out of sight or mind or missing from the table), and all that is mine is yours” already yours. Why, my child, are you wasting your life trying to earn what has been freely given? **Why are you living like I have not already died for you, too?**

REFLECTION |

The story of the two sons is your story and mine. It is our story and our neighbors. **We are all somewhere along the story’s plot:** telling God off...trying to live off what he’s given us but in our own way...moving in one way or another to the end of our own efforts...realizing perhaps our need for something more...and contemplating the means by which to gain it with as little dependence on the other as possible on our return...weighing and encountering humiliation for our aboutface...and experiencing the restoration of what we lost like it was something totally new...or we’re just here, where we’ve always been...doing our best to ensure that we don’t lose what is ours someday...keeping all the diligent duties, but not taking advantage of the real treasure of our inheritance, communion with the Father, grace upon grace awaiting us each evening at the table...outside the faith party pouting about a life we think we deserve, which we actually have but are missing out on...and perhaps, we too see and hear the humiliation for us and follow our Father into the life that has always been ours, yet is something wholly new.

So, let’s discuss where you are in the parable’s plot and how this story is like yours.

The Orthodox theologian and priest, Father John Breck, said our hearts are opened, prepared for our journey ahead and our inevitable arrival this way,

"...it can come to us as well when we observe it in the people around us: people with whom and for whom we pray, people who in many cases pray for us without our being aware of it. **We find that bright sadness in communion with them, in hearing their stories, in sharing their hopes, fears and longings.** We find it through being attentive to the beauty and truth of their life and their unique presence." (Father John Breck)

So, let's share our stories, hopes, fears, and longings along our journey of faith today.

DISCUSSION

- Where are you in the parable's plot?
- How is this story like yours?

SONG #3 – Sing Over Me by Porters Gate

COMMUNION |

And he said to him, 'Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. It was fitting to celebrate and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found.' (Luke 15:32)

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Christ's body and blood: for us,
they were given.

This bread and this cup tell us
we're forgiven.

Once dead, now alive.

Once lost, now found.

What is His, now ours,
with Him.

Amen

SONG #4 – A Son of God by Nathan Partain

BENEDICTION | Ephesians 2:1-7

As we rest in the day made for us, we prepare to enter into the work for which we are made [**LIGHT THE CANDLE**], remembering:

It wasn't so long ago that you were mired in that old stagnant life of sin. You let the world, which doesn't know the first thing about living, tell you how to live. You filled your lungs with polluted unbelief, and then exhaled disobedience. We all did it, all of us doing what we felt like doing, when we felt like doing it, all of us in the same boat. It's a wonder God didn't lose his temper and do away with the whole lot of us. Instead, immense in mercy and with an incredible love, he embraced us. He took our sin-dead lives and made us alive in Christ. He did all this on his own, with no help from us! Then he picked us up and set us down in highest heaven in company with Jesus, our Messiah. Now God has us where he wants us, with all the time in this world and the next to shower grace and kindness upon us in Christ Jesus.