

Luke 15:1-3, 11-32

April 3, 2019

“Our Compassionate Father”

Our Redeemer Lutheran Church

4th Wednesday in Lent

Vicar Otterman

Grace, mercy, and peace be unto you from God, Our Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. Amen.

[Introduction]

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ.

I’m going to tell you a true story about a distant relative of mine. This relative was raised by wealthy parents who wanted the best for their daughter: a successful career, a beautiful home, and a happy life. Your basic American dream.

But when she turned eighteen and graduated from high school, she asked her parents for her inheritance, which they gave her. It was a substantial amount that her wealthy grandparents had left for her.

Then she moved away to the West coast, leaving her home and her parents behind. She reinvented herself and cut ties with her family, because she was tired and resentful of their demands and expectations. She even went as far as to change her name, not just her first name but her last name also. She left no visible link between her and her parents.

She had disowned them.

[Disowned]

By disowning her family in this way, she communicated that she wanted nothing to do with them. She abandoned her parents in a wake of heartache, and they were left with a choice to make.

They could accept the fact that she had disowned them and move on with their lives, or they could watch from afar, looking for any opportunity to reconcile and reunite with their lost daughter.

They could have punished her for the pain and shame she caused them by disowning her as well. But that’s not what they did. Instead they waited patiently and watched for opportunities, saying in their hearts, “You will always be our

daughter and we will always be your parents. You may be lost to us now, but we will not stop looking for you.”

And now decades later, after patiently waiting, their relationship is beginning to heal. She has come back home, changed her first name back to her given name and is actively seeking a relationship with them.

[God Seeks His Children]

Just as earthly parents have to decide how to treat their family members who abandon them, our heavenly Father also decided how to treat His children who run away from Him.

When Jesus tells the parable of the prodigal son, we get a clear and wonderful picture of God’s Fatherly love for His children. In the parable, a son asked for his inheritance, which at that time would have been the same as saying that he would rather his father were dead.

Remarkably, the father gave the inheritance, and the son left and traveled to distant lands. After he squandered the money, a terrible famine hit and he became desperately hungry, so he knew that his only option was to go back to his father.

But he also knew that he had sinned against his father, and he assumed that his father had disowned him as well, so he concocted a plan to go back home and ask to become a servant, so he could at least be fed in his father’s house.

But his father hadn’t disowned him. In fact, he had been looking for him, because he wanted his son back.

Jesus said that while the son was still a long way off, the father saw him and ran to him. And before the son could even say a word, his Father hugged and kissed him, as a show of his love and his joy of being reunited with his son.

Even though his son had given up on him, he never gave up on his son.

[Jesus Seeks God’s Children]

Jesus used this parable to show how God runs after His lost children, which is exactly what He was doing when He sent Jesus to us. Jesus’ ministry was focused

on retrieving God's lost children. He ate with tax collectors and sinners, and he forgave their sins.

Jesus was sent to gather the lost people into God's family. He went to the outcasts in Judah, whom the religious leaders would have nothing to do with. He came to them just as the Father in the parable ran to his son. He embraced them by going to their homes. And he treated them like family by sharing a meal with them.

When the pharisees grumbled and asked him why he associated with tax collectors and sinners, he said to them, "I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance." (*Luke 5:31-32*)

As sinful people, we disowned God, but God did not disown us. He watched for us. He laid out his plan of salvation and sent Jesus to die on the cross for our sins and to call us into his family through faith. We are his children, and He rejoices to have us back.

[The Elder Brother]

But Jesus gives us another character in this parable, the elder brother. Unlike the father who had been looking for his lost son, he was not looking for his younger brother. In fact, when the father welcomed the younger son back home and celebrated with a feast, the older brother refused to go to the party.

The older brother did not see a long-lost sibling. He didn't want to welcome his brother back after the shame and hurt he'd caused. When the younger brother left and disowned his family, the older brother had disowned him as well.

The older brother no longer thought of his younger sibling in terms of family. Instead, he only saw his brother's impurity, and he was offended that his father would go to such great lengths to celebrate the return of such a shameful son.

[God's Family]

When Jesus told the story of the elder brother, he was talking to the pharisees, and showing them how they were acting when they grumbled about Jesus eating and drinking with sinners.

They looked at people in terms of righteous and wicked, good and evil, pure and impure, us and them.

Sometimes we do the same thing. We draw lines between our church and their church, or between us and the rest of the unbelieving world. And many of these lines are drawn for good reasons, but they become a problem when we forget to see our fellow Christians as brothers and sisters in Christ. They become a problem when we fail to see non-Christians as lost siblings who need to be found.

You and I have been made God's children through baptism. We are already members of His family with all the promises of forgiveness, salvation, and eternal life that go with it.

But the question for us today is, 'How do we treat the rest of the world?' Do we disown them, drawing a line in the sand that says, 'I'm God's child, and you are not'? Or do we look at the world and see what God sees: a multitude of our lost brothers and sisters?

Jesus came to find us, even taking our sin on himself and dying on the cross so that we could be reunited with our Heavenly Father, and now it's our turn to look for our lost brothers and sisters. It's our turn to run to them, embrace them, and invite them into God's family. And for every lost child who is found, we can celebrate and rejoice that we have a Father who loves us so dearly. Amen.

"Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you." (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18)
