

## A Man with Two Sons

Luke 15: 11-32

The Fourth Sunday in Lent, March 6, 2016

Immanuel Lutheran Church, Broadlands

There once was a man who had two sons.

He was a wealthy man. He owned many acres which he put to good use. He made wise investments and they paid him a healthy return. Over the years he had accumulated enough wealth to afford himself a comfortable living and was able to provide many blessings to his family which other people could not.

His older son was hard working. He took after his father. He helped his father on the farm. He worked diligently at school. He earned good grades and was the local basketball star at school. He respected authority. Everyone at school admired the young man. He enrolled in a university in an agricultural program and began helping his father on the farm.

His younger son was lazy. He did not apply himself the way that the older son did. His grades suffered as a result. He was frequently in trouble at school. He did not understand the concept of teamwork enough to play on any sports team. Many times his father was called into the school as part of a disciplinary actions against his son.

As the younger son grew older, he got into trouble with the authorities. More than once a police officer escorted the younger son to his father's home on minor charges of theft. But as time progressed it became evident that the younger son had fallen in with the wrong crowd of people. He began drinking heavily and eventually starting using drugs. In order to fund his drug habit he stole. That is why the police kept bringing him up on charges of theft. The police could never catch him in possession of an illegal substance nor could they catch him at a DUI, but the younger son was guilty of both.

Eventually petty theft was not sufficient for the younger son's drug habits. He eventually had to obtain more money in order to keep funding his lifestyle. So he went through his father's things in his study. He found his father's bank account number and social security number and made use of that information to take some money from one of his father's many accounts. At first the younger son thought for sure that he would get caught, but his father seemed not to notice. The son stole from his father a little bit here and a little bit there and kept his habit of using with his friends.

Eventually the father did begin to notice that his accounts were being depleted and at first he could not figure out where his money was going. After consulting with the bank he had a growing suspicion that someone in his own house had to be taking the money. There could be only one person that it could be. And so on one occasion when the younger son happened to be home, his father inquired. "Son, there is money missing from my accounts. Have you taken it?" The younger son did not want to answer the question. He did not want to admit to what he was doing. He wanted to keep on doing it. He lied to his father and told him, "No." The father persisted convinced that his younger son was involved in something that would harm him. "Then why is the money missing from my accounts? The only people who have access to the information necessary to retrieve any money are the family, that includes you." The younger son felt cornered and lashed out at his father, "Have you asked my older brother? You always treat him better than me! Do you treat him the way that you treat me?" The father answered, "No, I have not asked your older brother. He has earned my trust, but you have a record of bad behavior. Now I would like to know if you are the one that has been stealing from my account." The younger son flew off of the handle. He struck his father on the mouth, "You don't have any say over me! You don't love me! You don't have any right to question me! I wish you were dead!" The younger son stormed from the

room and before the father could change his arrangements with the bank the younger son emptied half of his father's accounts. He would have emptied them all if he could have, but there were certain safety regulations in his father's investments that prevented him from doing so.

The son then stole one of his father's cars and took off for a place as far away as he could think of to get away from his father. He drove several states away from his home and since he had plenty of money, he rented an apartment in this new city.

It wasn't long before he had new friends in this city. With his father's money he had plenty to spend. People loved spending time with him because he would spend some of his money on them. He resumed his life of drugs and alcohol and in this new city he found the pleasures of fornication. Women showered him with attention because they knew he had money. He made use of his wealth in order to make use of women. He thought to himself that surely he was leading the good life.

Then his father's money ran out. He had spent it all. He realized that he had nothing. The rent on the apartment came due and he could not pay it. His friends came to see him expecting him to throw a party like before, but he could no longer afford it. In fact he could not afford anything. He wound up homeless and on the street. He had nothing. His so called friends had abandoned him. The only reason that they had been with him in the first place was because of his money. Now that his money was gone, his friends were gone as well.

He was in a homeless shelter for a while, but in his arrogance he felt that he was better than those people in the homeless shelter. He left the shelter and managed to find a man's house that he knew from his partying days hoping that this man would help him out.

The man that he went to for help was an unscrupulous man. When the young son was standing on his door begging for help, he saw an opportunity to take advantage of the young man. He paid him to do various odd jobs, but he paid him under the table. No checks were written. It was all done in cash. The man barely paid him anything to do what he was doing, but there was nothing the young man could do. In his pride he refused to go back to the shelter and seek help from a charity that would help him, but at the same time he knew that this man was using him. He was doing all of these things for him and getting nothing in return except barely enough to survive. The man had a small two room cabin in the back yard where he had the young son live and the young son had to do the man's will. If he tried to sue, there was no evidence that he had been hired. No contracts were signed. How would the young son even afford a lawyer to sue the guy? He was trapped.

Meanwhile back at the farm the father was concerned about his younger son. He had not seen his younger son for several months. There was no communication from his son at all. There was no activity on his bank accounts now that he had changed his security protocols with his investments. He tried to text and call his younger son, but the younger son had changed his phone number in order to avoid his dad and then later was unable to afford one anyway. Even if he had not changed his number his father could not get a hold of him.

His father began searching for his younger son. He went to some of his younger son's worthless friends from high school and asked them if they knew where he was. They either did not know or would not tell him. He asked around town if anyone knew. No one knew where his son was. People began to talk about the father and his son. Most people were sympathetic toward the father. They all agreed that the younger son was worthless, but many people also wondered why the father would care about a son that had treated him so. In their hearts they despised the father for showing such compassion toward his

son. They knew that the son was probably getting what the son deserved. Why should the father care so much?

The father continued to look for his son. He contacted the authorities. The authorities were reluctant to help because it had been months since the son went missing. They did not want to divert important police resources to a search that statistically speaking would produce no results. A few notices went out regarding a missing person, but to no avail.

Finally, the father hired a private detective. He gave the detective all of the information that he had and asked the detective to find his son. He paid the detective a retainer and paid all of his expenses pertaining to the search for his son. The younger son had so carefully covered his tracks. All this time the father was paying the investigator's retainer and all of his expenses.

The father's business was suffering. In addition to the added expense of the private investigator his distraction regarding his younger son was not helping the farm. He was not making wise decisions and the farm was suffering. His investments were also suffering because he could not focus his complete attention on them and besides he needed to liquidate some of them in order to pay for the continued search for his son.

Finally, after two years of searching the private investigator tracked down the younger son. He reported to the father that he had found him. The father was delighted and wrote a note to his younger son inviting him to come home and promising that his sins would all be forgiven. The father got the address from the private detective and drove all those states away to see his son. His expenses mounted. The expense of driving added to the expense of staying in motels on the way. He found the unscrupulous man's house where his son was staying in a cabin in the back. He knocked on the cabin's door and his son was not there. So he left a note. He had to go out and purchase paper and pen to do it. He did not bring those things with him. He left a note. He invited his son to come back home. He promised that all of his sins would be forgiven.

While he was writing his note, his son came to the cabin. He ran to his son and embraced him. His younger son then realized that his father had been searching for him this whole time. He realized that his father's love for him had never waned. He realized that his father would take him back into his home. At that point the younger son came into himself and said, "Father, I have sinned against God and against you. I am not worthy to be called your son." The younger son was getting ready to beg his father to be allowed to be a hired man on the farm. The younger son knew that the hired men on his father's farm were faring better than he was living the way that he was. He realized that he did not deserve his father's love. He was so desperate to get out of the slavery in which he was living and to have a little money just to buy something to eat that he felt he had no choice but to beg his father for a hired position on the farm. But the father did not give him the time to even ask. The father rushed him out to his car and drove him home. They drove all those states homes. They stayed in all of those motels again. The father inquired about what had happened to his son and listened as his son poured out his heart to him.

When they got back the father would not hear of his son working for him. The son regained his old place in the house. If the son wanted an education the father was willing to help fund it. The father began calling all of his friends and relatives to come to the house and see the younger son again. The friends and relatives were so amazed that the younger son was back home and that the father had found him, that they all drove over to the house to see him. So many people were coming and going that the father started to put out food for them to eat. Finally, he cracked out wine for them to drink. Soon they were celebrating the return of this lost son.

Once he realized that a celebration was under way, he called even more of his relatives and told them, "Come and see this my son! We are having a celebration for he was dead and is alive again! He was lost and is found!"

Word got out to the hired men on the farm. Some were pleased. Others were concerned now that this worthless son had returned that he might steal more money from the farmer and that they would lose their positions as hired men. Word finally got out to the older son who was working some ground for his father in another county.

The older son was furious with his father. This was the last straw! His father had spent all of that money looking for that worthless brother of his and now he was at home having a party celebrating his return! The older son could not help himself. When one of the hired men told him what his father was doing he lost his temper. He knew that he should not do it in front of the hired man, but he did. He went on and on about how unfair it was.

Well, as life would have it that hired man told the other hired men about how mad the older son was and word got back to the father who was still celebrating the return of his son with his relatives and friends.

So the father got in the truck and drove out to the farm where his older son was working. He did not want to send a text or talk to him on the phone. Something this important had to be done in person. He got out of the truck and approached his son and before he could say anything to his older son, the older son unloaded on him. "How dare you take that worthless son of yours back! Don't you realize what he has done to you! What he has done to the farm! He has crippled us financially and you have contributed to our downfall by spending all of that money to go and find him! Don't you understand how that makes me feel! I have worked for you this whole time. I have never disobeyed you and what inheritance am I going to get if you keep on spending it on that worthless son of yours who squandered half of your investments on hookers and booze! Don't you know how mom feels? Don't you know that you are the butt of all of the jokes in town? Everyone is talking about you and they all view you as that stupid tired old father pining away over a worthless son. I cannot even show my face in public anymore because they associate me with you. You ignorant fool."

And once the son had unloaded all of his anger on his father, his father said to him, "My son, you have always been with me and you always will. You will inherit everything that I have. But we had to celebrate and be glad for this your brother was dead and is alive again! He was lost and is found!"