



THE WORD FOR TODAY

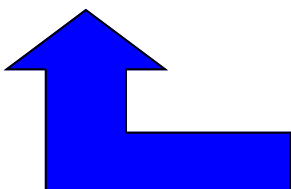
Luke's Gospel, Chapter 15, vv 11-24 ***The parable of the lost (or prodigal) son***

Like many of the stories Jesus told, this is a story which people everywhere can easily understand—a father with two sons he loves dearly, whatever they do. He wants them to be happy. He doesn't want to hold them back from doing what they want to do—but he really hopes that whatever they are doing they will stay in touch with him and keep close, because he cares. It's a wonderful story, related only in Luke's Gospel, which illustrates to us what God our Heavenly Father is like and just how great is his mercy and love for all of us, his children.

(Please note that the parable continues in the Bible up to verse 32, the end of the chapter. We didn't have space to include these verses but hope you will read them yourselves.)



Follow the words of this passage round the church, beginning on the north wall of this little building. There is stonework going on so please take care: keep away from the scaffolding and if you walk on the grass be careful not to slip if it is at all damp. We are using the New International Version of the Bible, which you can find on the internet under Bible Gateway, and the whole "Word for Today" is on the church website, which is www.libertonkirk.net You can also find meditations and prayers on other Bible passages there in previous "Words for Today".



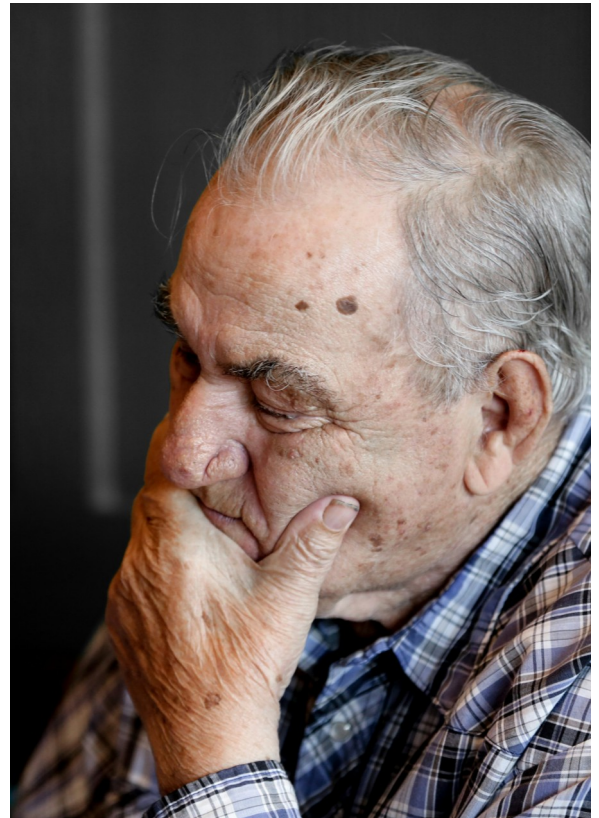
Turn immediately left to find the first verses of the Bible passage on the bench

“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.”

1

This was not how it was intended to happen! Yes, his sons would get his estate between them, but that would be after his death. This request must have worried the father—he must have seen it as a warning that the son was thinking of leaving home. He probably tried to persuade him not to do this, but in the end he thought he should let the son do what he wanted to do.

It’s very easy to be selfish like the younger son—to look after yourself and forget the effect your actions are having on other people. We can probably all find times in our lives when we have gone our own way without thinking of anybody else who might care what we are doing.



***Lord, thank you for giving us all the freedom to think for ourselves.
Help me to guard against selfishness.
May I always think of other people when I make big decisions.***

(Station 2 is on the East side of the church building just past the scaffolding on the right, but if you don’t want to walk past the scaffolding on the grass, walk round the church in the other direction until you eventually find Station 2.)



THE WORD FOR TODAY

“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.”

2

The father’s fears were well-founded, and his younger son left home. News reached the family that he was not using his money wisely, but rather losing it rapidly on riotous living. It could not end well.

“The other man’s grass is always greener” is a feeling we probably know about. I remember, at around the same age as this young man, thinking that life at home in the North East of England was boring compared with what life could be in the bright lights of London, and launching myself into it with little regard to the devastation and worry it caused my elderly parents. I did keep in touch with home, however, and found a career (and a husband) all of which were stabilising influences.



***Lord, thank you for the people who keep us grounded.
Thank you for parents—help us to appreciate them.
May we never squander your many gifts to us, but use them wisely.***

(No. 3 is further along this side of the church building)

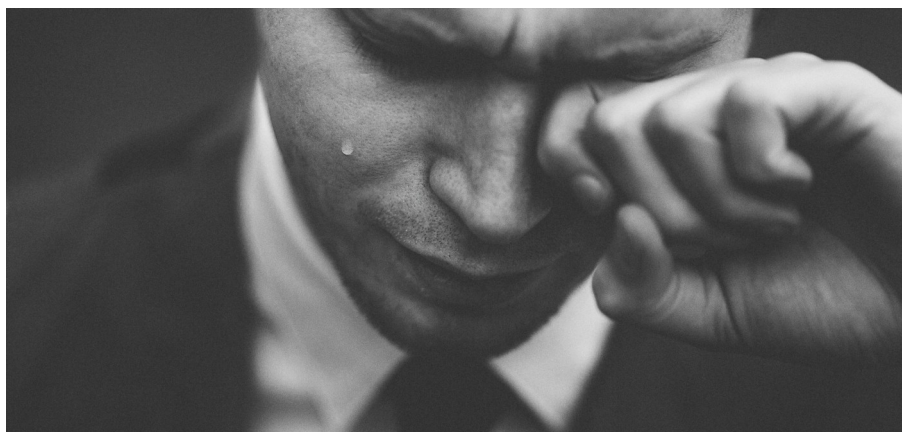


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“After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no-one gave him anything.”

This young man was in a bad place. He was at rock bottom—he couldn’t sink any lower. Those last words say it all: “but no-one gave him anything”. He felt completely alone, and he probably knew it was all his own fault. He had distanced himself from his home and the people who loved him. What he didn’t know was that his father was longing for him to come home and was probably looking out for him every day and praying for him.

You may feel in a really bad place at times—you may feel nobody cares. But God is still there. He knows where you are, how you feel, and longs for you to turn to him.



*Lord, when life is difficult, let me know you are there.
Draw me closer to you.
Hold me in your loving arms and tell me you care.*

(Walk along the back of the church and turn right to find No. 4 on the prayer bench)



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4

“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! I will set out and go back to my father “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.”

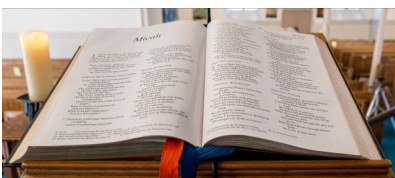
In the midst of his misery he suddenly remembers home and all its blessings. But things have changed—he can’t just go back to where he was. He’s let his father down and he has to admit that. It dawns on him that the people his father employed were well provided for, and he resolves to go back and ask his father if he could have a job.

Sometimes we need a prompt to remind us that God is always there. Then, if we can just admit our failings, we can seek him out and find the comfort and strength we need.



*Lord, through your Spirit guide me to seek you out.
Help me to be honest with you.
I know I don’t deserve your forgiveness and love.
Help me to change, to live the sort of life you want me to.*

(No. 5 is on the West side of the church before you come to the tower)



THE WORD FOR TODAY

5

“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.”

This sentence is what makes me feel the father was looking out for his wayward son—scanning the horizon regularly for a familiar figure. One day that figure appears—very scruffy, thin and downcast, but recognisable. The father runs to give him a big welcoming hug. How good that must have felt for both of them!



Can you believe that God is like that? Jesus told this story so that we could all realise that whatever we have done, wherever we have been, God is looking out for us and hoping that we will turn to him. The welcome will be better than we could possibly imagine.

*Lord, when I am wayward and forget about you
guide me to turn back to you.
Thank you for the assurance that there will be a welcome for me.*

(Walk towards the front of the church and find No. 6 near the cairn)



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“The son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’”

6

It’s not easy to say that you are sorry—to admit that you have hurt somebody badly and don’t deserve to be forgiven. This young man had worked out what he needed to say to his father if he was to receive any sort of forgiveness and have a chance of a new start. He bravely said that he knew he didn’t deserve to be treated as his father’s son any more. I think that he must have felt better once he had admitted what he had done wrong, and the father would know that he was truly sorry by those words.



If there’s something in your life you are guilty about, and you should really be saying you are sorry to someone, why not do it now and ask forgiveness? Perhaps you are reluctant to get close to God because of something in your past—try telling him you are sorry and want to live differently. This is why Jesus died on the cross—so that we could be forgiven and welcomed back into God’s family..

*Lord, thank you for your promise of forgiveness.
I am sorry for the things I have done that I am ashamed of.
Please forgive, and help me to make a new start.*

(Walk to the front of the church and find No. 7 on one of the benches)



THE WORD FOR TODAY

“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.”



Such a welcome! The son must have been overwhelmed. The father’s joy at his return was so great and the whole occasion such a celebration that he must have felt it to be far, far more than he deserved.

It’s quite a thought that God is looking for all those who have strayed in the hope that they will find their way back and earn such a welcome for themselves!

***Loving Lord, thank you for your love for all your children,
for your willingness to welcome back with such joy,
for your forgiveness and acceptance into your family.***

If anything you have read has prompted questions you would like to discuss, please contact John Young on 664 3067 or jyoung@churchofscotland.org.uk



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