



MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

www.mzluth.org

March 27, 2022
4th Sunday in Lent

Pastor James Enderle

First Lesson: [Judges 10:6-16](#)

Psalm of the Day: Psalm 115

Second Lesson: [James 4:7-10](#)

Gospel Lesson/Sermon Text: [Luke 15:1-3, 11a-32](#)

Mark of the Messiah: Points Us to God's Lavish Love

Welcome to worship today at Morrison Zion Lutheran Church. We exist to glorify God. We have set out to do this by gathering around the Gospel so that we may grow in the Gospel and go to others with this Gospel.

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from Jesus Christ, our Lord:

Have you ever given a gift and the gift you gave didn't give the reaction you expected from the person you gave it to? You thought, *oh, this is just the perfect gift. They are going to love it.* Then they get it and they are like "Oh, what is this?" Or "Why did you think I wanted this?" I didn't have that exact experience but I had a similar experience where I just felt so bad about a gift, and I didn't know how to react.

I was in China a few years ago. We had people over to our house, anywhere between three-five times a week, for Bible study and church and so forth. We wanted ways to hang out more and to do activities. I wanted a Wii so we could play tennis, bowling, Mario Kart and all that stuff. I had talked to my parents and my in-laws and they, together, bought this gift for me, this Wii. I knew a friend was bringing it shortly after Christmas but on Christmas, some of the people on our mission team, some of the other lay workers, the Americans who we worked with to share the Gospel over there, they had this awesome surprise. I'm horrible for people to buy gifts for. You have to ask my wife. I either buy it for myself or it's hard to find something for me. But these people on our mission team, they bought me a Wii. So I was opening up the Christmas present, and I get this Wii, and I'm like "This is so awesome but I'm getting one..." and I just didn't know how to react. I can imagine what they were thinking. *This is just the greatest gift! He wanted this. It's a surprise. And it's hard to surprise him.* And here I am and I could just imagine my face being like (*thinking about what to say/do face*). Sometimes when we give gifts or get gifts, it's not what is expected.

When we look at God's love and the gifts He gives us, the **Lavish Love** He gives, people don't all receive it in the same way or treat it the same way. When we look at the story of the prodigal son or the lost son, we see this love of the father, this **Lavish Love**.

While it's often called the prodigal son, the real focus of the story is the father. The story is actually about the two sons. It's not just about the one. It's about two. You see at the beginning of the parable, He is telling the story to the Pharisees. The Pharisees are gathering together and they are looking at Jesus and they are saying "This man, he eats with sinners!" So what does He do? He tells two parables before that about how Jesus seeks the lost. A sheep that is lost and then a coin that is found and they celebrate and they're so excited about finding the lost. Then He tells this other story where it's not someone going to seek but first we hear about this son who does something with God's love first. We see what he does.

There are these two sons and He says the younger one, in Verse 3, went to his father and said "**Father, give me my share of the estate.**" What does this mean? Let's translate into our language today. "Hey dad, give me my inheritance. I wish you were dead. I don't need you. I don't need your love. I don't need who you are or our relationship. I just want your money. I want your things." This could probably be the worst thing a child could say to a parent. "I wish you were dead. Just give me your stuff." What we don't always think about is did the father have to do this? What could the father have actually done? He could have said "Get away from me! You are no longer my son. I don't owe you anything!" But instead, he gives him the estate and he sends him off. So this father shows great love for the son, but then what does this son do?

We see the first instance of **Lavish Love** where the son goes off and he abuses this **Lavish Love**. This **Lavish Love** is abused. How is it abused? The younger son goes off to **a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living**. We don't know exactly everything he did later. We find out the older son says that he spent his money on prostitutes, but I think again, translating it to our world, he went to Las Vegas. He lived it up. I picture him buying people and buying things and buying friendships. If you really think about prostitution, that's buying people for their love or a type of love. He used this money and tried to live up life and abused that love that the father gave him.

What was the result? We see that he is losing his money. He doesn't have much left. Then a famine hits and he is in need. He needs to work. Not only does he need to work, but he hires himself off to a farmer and it doesn't seem like a great farmer. He sends him off into the fields and says "You can help and feed the pigs." What's his daily wage? It doesn't even say he has a wage. But there he is and he is sitting there and he is just wishing to eat the food that the pigs eat. I'm not a farmer but I know some of you probably raise pigs and know they can eat slop. They can eat pretty much anything. But did you notice another thing it says? He wishes to eat the food that the pigs eat, but then it says that **no one gave him anything**. Who is there for him? What does he have?

He doesn't have food. He is starving. Not only that, he has no one. He is alone. Not even a stranger; no one will give him food. His sins have led him to do wicked things, to waste this money, and then it has led him to one of the worst places; to have nothing and to have no one. He is lost. He is starving. He is sitting in the mud and muck of pigs.

Then what does he remember? This is really important. Why does he start to get up? Why does he change and want to go home? It says he remembers what his father is like. He says, "***How many of my father's hired servants have food to spare, and here I am starving to death!***" He remembers that his father is not just a loving father but a loving man. His servants have more than enough to eat. His servants aren't treated like he is being treated. He remembers the **Lavish Love** of his father. So he says "I'm going to go back and I don't even want to be a son. I can just be a servant. I don't need all the things I had before. I'll just work. I'll work it off. I'll be in a better place if I can just even be a servant at my father's house." Then in Verse 20 it says he got up and went on his way. That could be figurative speech but you could also think about it that there he is, getting up out of that muck with the pigs.

As he is going home, he is rehearsing and thinking about what he is going to say to his father. "I have sinned against you and against God. I don't even deserve to be your child." He is rehearsing and rehearsing. He is repentant. He knows what he has done wrong.

What do we see? As he is going up and is still a far way off from home, his father sees him. So what does this tell us, that the father sees him? He isn't just busy and not thinking or caring about this son, he is watching for him. He is waiting for him. He is hoping that this long-lost son comes back. Then he runs to him.

In the culture of that time, they would wear something a little more close to what I'm wearing and they'd have to hold up their clothes and it was almost disrespectful for a father to run. Here his neighbors know what had happened; that this son had rejected him and said "Why don't you just die." But here he is, running to give this son a hug.

I know some of you work on farms. Some of you kids may have worked on farms. I hear corn silage even has a stench. Sometimes you get in the car and you don't even want them to come in the house. Now imagine pig manure. This son is covered in pig manure. Does the father stop and say "Oh, wait, wait"? No, he goes and embraces him and gives him that love even in the muck and the dirt and the stench that he is in. Here we see **Lavish Love** received. The son is just expecting and wanting to be a servant, to work it off. But what does the father say? He doesn't even let him finish his apology. Instead he calls his servants and says, "Bring a robe and bring a ring and kill the fattened calf! My lost son is back! He once was dead but now he is found." He shows this

Lavish Love when it wasn't expected and when it wasn't deserved. He does all these things to show "You are not a servant. You are welcomed back into the family."

This is the love that God gives to sinners. This is the love that God gives to you and to me every time we turn away and we deliberately go and do the things we know we're not supposed to do. We do them over and over and over again. But we say "God, I don't deserve this. I deserve your punishment. I want to go as far away, I can barely look." Finally after we've lost too much and we feel like we have no hope, where do we turn? We finally go back to God. What does He do? Does He make a list of things we have to do? "Okay, you must do this. You must do this." No! He gives us that love and forgiveness and welcomes us and says "You are my forgiven, loved child of God." That's who God is. That's who Jesus is, that welcomes sinners, welcomes the ones that others reject and mock and scorn. Because this is what we see, right?

Then the older brother comes back and you can just imagine this. He is out in the field and he hears music, a party, and even dancing. He hears music and dancing and wonders *what is going on?* The father says "Your brother is back." How does he feel? He is so angry! Is he rejoicing? Is he celebrating like all those parables before of the lost sheep and the lost coin? This lost son is back. No. He is angry and he refuses to go in. This **Lavish Love** that the father shows is despised by this older brother. The older brother can't even stand to go in and talk to the brother or join in the celebration at all.

So the father comes out and says "Come on in. Come celebrate." But you'll notice what the older brother says. *"...this son of yours..."* He won't call him his brother. He calls him *"...this son of yours..."* "He wants you to be dead. He takes all your money and squanders it, and now you just welcome him back! I've done everything! I've always done everything you ask and what have you given me? You won't even give me a goat to celebrate with my friends." Look at this though. What did the younger son want when he left? He wanted the father's things, the money. What does the older son want? And how does he want it? He is not concerned about his relationship with his father. He's not concerned about the love. He says "You won't even give me a goat." He wants the same thing. He wants the stuff but he is trying to get it in another way; by his works, by being so good and by doing all the right things. He's saying "I deserve good from you and this man, this son of yours, he deserves nothing and you welcome him back? How can you do this? You're foolish! You're such a foolish man to do this." I can just imagine him saying "I hate you and I hate him and I don't want to be part of this family!" He is saying that by not going in and celebrating.

This is how we are sometimes. When we look down on others and think that we are better than them. When people come back to God and we gossip about them and we talk about all the things that they've done and we don't welcome them. Instead we scorn them and shun them and despise them. I used this example once before but I think it's an interesting one. We have a young woman in our congregation who got

pregnant before they were married. If they walked into church, what would you do? How would you look at them? Would you look at them with scorn because "How could they get pregnant before they were married?" Would they even come into church because they know that is what they are going to hear? That's just one example, but we have to look at how we treat those who are struggling with their sins and coming back in repentance and are in the same picture of those who have been far off and are coming back.

What does God want to do with this **Lavish Love**? We saw it in the parables. We see it in this story too. After that lost sheep was found, after the coin was found, and now the lost son is found, what do they do? They party. They celebrate. This **Lavish Love** is meant to be shared and celebrated.

When someone comes to God and receives grace and forgiveness, we want to throw a party, not look at them in scorn and say "How could you do that?" It's not excusing the sin. It's not saying what was done is okay. It's realizing in some ways we are no different. We ALL have fallen short. We ALL struggle with different sins. And we ALL need God's **Lavish Love** in the same way. We all are struggling, either like that younger son who had gone off and been distant, or maybe like the older son who struggled with a self-righteous attitude. The important thing is that we find ourselves maybe in both of these sons at different times, where you can see "I've done this and I've done that. I've abused God's love and I've despised when God gives His love to others."

So then how can we share His love? How can we celebrate His love? We share His love by telling others and telling of that great joy that we have and we want others to have it too and know that they are forgiven and loved. Those people who are bogged down with such guilt and fear and feel like they'll burst into flames when they step into a church, we can tell them they are loved. We also share and celebrate when people do walk in, and we rejoice.

As we continue to start our Barnabas Ministry, there may be people that haven't been in church for a while. That's our goal. We want people who have maybe been far from God, far from His Word at times to be back and to be experiencing God's love. That's why we come to church. Not because you have to. Not because anyone forces you to, but because here you hear about God's love. You hear about the Gospel here, where in the rest of the world you don't hear it. So we welcome people back and we treat them like brothers and sisters. Not like the older son who says "You don't belong here. I don't want any part of this." But we welcome people back and celebrate. And we know that we each don't deserve God's love but He has given us this **Lavish Love** that we could never pay back, we could never earn. He has given it to us in such a beautiful way that it HAS to be shared. It HAS to be celebrated. We HAVE to have a party because of what it means. It means grace and salvation and forgiveness with no requirements because it is given out freely. That's what His **Lavish Love** means.

The parable ends in kind of an interesting way. Just like Israel, we have no promise that this younger son is not going to abuse his love again. We don't know. Then the older son is out there and the father is pleading with him to come back in, but it ends before we know. This story is told to those Pharisees, those He is asking and pleading with to come into the party, to come into God's family. This is the message we have to share; that God gives this **Lavish Love**. And it's not all about us. It's not our work. It's not our power. It's our privilege to share and to celebrate what **God's Lavish Love** means. It means our grace, our forgiveness, our salvation, and true peace into eternity. Amen.

And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. ([Philippians 4:7](#).) Amen.