



# MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

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March 30, 2025  
4<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Lent

Pastor James Enderle

Lesson: [Romans 8:1-10](#)

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

## OPEN DOOR POLICIES Grace Instead of Condemnation FINDING YOURSELF IN GOD'S HOUSE

1. Two \_\_\_\_\_ sons and a \_\_\_\_\_ Father
2. A \_\_\_\_\_ son who is now \_\_\_\_\_
3. A \_\_\_\_\_ son who is \_\_\_\_\_
4. A \_\_\_\_\_ Father who is \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_

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:

It's always fascinating to look at family dynamics. If you have one child, parenting is still a challenge. Parenting just that one child is a challenge. But as soon as you have a few siblings, more than one child, each one of those children is a little bit different. There is the typical older child who often takes on certain characteristics and personality. Then there is the younger child and a middle child that might have certain characteristics. Do you parent all of those children the same way? If you're not a parent, maybe you're a child, you can think about this. Have you ever complained to your parents by saying, "You never did that with them" or "Why do you treat me that way? You didn't do it with them that way?" We always say, "It's not fair!" But each one of us is different and we parent and we have to correct and show love to each of our children in different ways.

Today as we look at our lesson, we see a father with two children that are very different and we see how he is going to show love, but because of their actions and their ways, we see him coming in different ways to them, but especially these two children, both with very different characteristics, with a father that has the same love but it's maybe shown in different ways. As we look at our lesson, we really want to focus on how you can **find yourself in God's house**. We can maybe put ourselves in the place of each of these sons at different times in our lives. It's important to recognize that. But then also we want to see our relationship with the Father and see His love and see how, when we are acting like each of these children, why and how we maybe treat the other siblings, the other people in God's church or in the world.

When we look at this text, it's very important to look at the context of who this parable was told to. You might find it a little bit interesting where in the lesson in the service folder it says in Verses 11-32, but before it has Verses 1-3 because it explains why Jesus told this parable at all. It says: ***Now the tax collectors and sinners were all gathering around to hear Jesus. But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them." Then Jesus told them this parable...*** So Jesus had been meeting with these outcasts, the people that the religious people looked down on, because they didn't think they deserved their time and they weren't worthy of God. But yet Jesus was spending lots of time with them. When we look at this parable, it's very important to understand that He is telling this parable to Pharisees and the teachers of the Law, the ones who are looking down on other sinners/people and they are not rejoicing when someone is forgiven, when someone goes and repents and sees God's grace and sees that love.

In the verses before these, He tells two different parables, The Lost Coin and The Lost Sheep. We see God's love and how He cares for all things, but we see the rejoicing over a coin and a lost sheep, representing someone repentant and coming to God. If heaven rejoices and people are so excited for those things, how much greater is the rejoicing and excitement for people?

We shift this then to two sons, one younger and one older. But as we look at this parable and the context, the parable often called The Prodigal Son, or The Lost Son, I think it is better in context to think about it as **two lost sons and a loving father**. We are going to see as we put ourselves in their places, that it's not just one lost son but two, and how we are at times maybe distant from God as well. One of them runs away, but we are going to also see the other one is going away from the father as well. We'll first address the younger son and then we'll address the older son.

We know what this younger son did. So many of the things he did were so offensive. Not only what he did but then what he had to deal with. When Jesus would be telling this story to the Pharisees, the teachers of the Law, they would be thinking that this guy is exactly like those undeserving sinners, the ones that we don't want to associate with. What did this man do? He went to his father and asked for his inheritance.

When do you get your inheritance? When a parent dies; so what is he telling his dad? "I wish you were dead." That's not a very loving thing to do. The father probably didn't have money sitting around. Part of the inheritance would probably cause him to sell some land, so this was something that would be embarrassing for his father to have to do this and sell some of his land and to know that his son cares about money and other things more than him, more than that relationship. Not only that, what does he then go and do with that money?

As a parent, you might give your kids some money to start a business, if you're good at finances, like Dave Ramsey and all these things. But is that what the son does? No, he goes off to a distant land and lives a sinful life and wastes all the money. We hear later from the older son when he describes what he did. ***"But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home..."*** Not only has he wasted his money but he went into sinful living. So he spends all his money. He lived a sinful life. Then a famine hits and what does he have to do? He has to work for someone else and the people he is working for do not even love enough to feed him. He has to go feed pigs. He even wants to eat what the pigs are eating, but they won't even give him that. How disgusting this would have been for the Jewish people. I know you probably love bacon, but of course we know the Jewish people couldn't have pigs. They couldn't have pork. That was against the ceremonial laws. So not only was he broke and hungry, but he is working with these unclean animals, these pigs, and wanting to eat what they eat.

The Pharisees would be so happy to compare this guy to all these people that Jesus is with. "This guy is so undeserving of love. He is a horrible guy!" Maybe you can think in your life if there have been times where you've done something so awful, so heinous, and you just don't know what to do. You are so embarrassed that you would never tell anyone what was going on. This is the situation where this son is in and he finally wakes up and starts to remember how loving his father is. ***"How many of my father's hired servants have food to spare, and here I am starving to death!"*** He had it good as his son, but even the workers of his father had it well. So he says, ***"I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: 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 servants."*** He wanted to go back home but he said he wasn't even worthy to be his son and wanted to work off his debt. He wanted to be his father's servant.

You can imagine he is in a far off land, so he is rehearsing this in his mind over and over again. But as he approaches home, we see the father, probably sitting there praying, hoping that this son returns. As an adult, as a parent, if you've had those different kids and maybe one of those children you are a little distant from, maybe a broken relationship, and you're hoping for that phone call, you're hoping one day they come back, you don't give up hope. You are praying and praying. This is what the father is doing. He sees him coming and what does he do? We talked about all the offensive things that the son did, but what is interesting is the things that the father did would have also offended the Pharisees. The first thing he did was run! For us, we think nothing of that. If you haven't seen a family member before and then at the airport you go and give a family member a big hug, your father maybe gives you a hug, this would have been offensive though. The father's didn't show emotion. They didn't run like that. So it would have been embarrassing for a father to go out into the countryside and run after his son and give him a hug. The people knew what the son had done and here is the father, going out and giving the son a big hug and a kiss!

Then we see the son repents and says he sinned against heaven and against his father. He doesn't want to be called his son, what he has been rehearsing. But the father really doesn't let him complete his words. Instead he says, ***"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."*** We have this first son, **a lost son who is now forgiven**. He was lost and he is found. He was dead and he is alive. He said he wasn't worthy of being part of the family, but everything the father did is in fact saying "You are part of the family." The ring, the robe, the sandals—all of these things are saying "You are part of the family." And then what is there to do but throw the biggest feast.

In the same way that the Pharisees would want nothing to do with this man, the father says "We have to celebrate. We have to have a party." Just like in those first two parables when something was lost and it's found, there is rejoicing, just as one sinner comes back and repents. He was lost and he is now forgiven. This is what God is always saying to us. There are open doors. No sin is too great. If you feel "I could never tell anyone. How could God forgive me for this thing?" God's grace is so great. And notice how he forgives. He doesn't go and then say "Okay, now you must work out this debt and work out that debt." He throws his arms around him and gives him that great forgiveness.

How do you think the Pharisees react to this? How does that make you feel? Is that fair? I know if you are Christian, if you have heard this story before, you think "Oh, that's great!" But if you do right all the time and someone else does not, if you think about your siblings, what if that one brother does wrong and he gets away with it, are you happy about that? This is what happens in that family where the older brother is now working out in the field. Does he have more work after that younger brother is gone? But here he has been slaving away and he comes back and hears that there is a party going on, and why? It's because his younger brother is back and his dad gave him the best, the filet mignon, the greatest meats. It's such a big party. He gets so upset and so angry, so he refuses to go in.

What happens is we see that the father went out and pleaded with him, but the son answered, ***"Look! All these years I've been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!"*** He is so upset. "It's not fair! I have done everything right! I'm always here and you give me nothing!" One of the sons was lost and ran away but now is at home in the house of God, forgiven, but what is this other son? He is **a self-righteous son who is outside**. He is now outside the house, outside the party and outside the love of the father. He just rejected it. He doesn't want it. Is this what happens sometimes with us when we get upset, when we think we can earn things from God?

What is kind of fascinating to think about is we see that one of the sons went away and now this son is going away, but how similar their attitudes actually are. What did the young son want from the father? "Give me the property. Give me my inheritance. Give me stuff." And now what do we see the older son wanting? He's been there all the time, but what is he really upset with? "You never even killed a little goat, a lamb. You wouldn't give me anything." Did he want the same thing that the younger son wanted? He didn't want the father's love. That wasn't good enough. He wanted stuff. He wanted what he wanted instead of what the father had to give him.

Are you and I that way as well? We know of God's grace. We know of God's love. We know Jesus has died for us, but "God, I'd really like it if you gave me this." Then we kind of become like that older son because we then start to bargain. We might start to treat God like a vending machine and say "I've done these good things, so I deserve this from you." Then we look at the world and we say, "Those people who aren't even Christian, or those really sinful people, they are getting good things. Their life is easy. God, I deserve this. Do you really love me?" We lose track of what God's love really is. Then are we standing on the outside, making it more about us and what we deserve or what we need than God and His love.

What is fascinating then is to see what the father does. He goes out to him and says, ***"You are always with me, and everything I have is yours. But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found."*** We see the love of this father going after both sons.

What we have asked throughout the sermon is which son are you? Are you the more rebellious one, the one who was away, maybe wasn't even Christian and has come to know God and know of Jesus' forgiveness? Are you the one who maybe is a little self-righteous, looking down on others? Now, if you are a Christian, you probably fluctuate back and forth. We're not perfect. We sin. We still struggle with that sinful nature. We also struggle with that pride. But the bigger question of who we are in here is actually looking at who this parable is really about.

My argument would be it's not so much about the two sons but about **a forgiving Father who is waiting and seeking**. We always talk about this parable about The Lost Son, or The Prodigal Son as it used to be known as. Do you know what "prodigal" actually means? We often hear the prodigal son has returned, so people think it's "wayward," one who has gone away, but "prodigal" actually means "unwise spending," "to excessively use something or give something." Does that talk about what the son did? He was foolish in his spending of money, but who also was foolish in this story? It was the father. Some argue that this story should maybe be called The Prodigal God, The Loving Father, because it's more about the father, who is forgiving and seeking to

show love to both sons. He is one who is waiting for that son to return and give open arms and the other one who is seeking, who goes out to say "Son, I have always loved you. Everything is yours," but he is refusing to come back in.

So whichever we are on whichever day, we know that we can repent and go to our Father at any time because Jesus is that Savior. Jesus is the one who did everything for us perfectly so that we can go to our Father, so we don't have to worry if something is too great, if I've done too much, but to know that Jesus died for EVERY sin on the cross. When my self pride gets too much of me and I make it more about myself, in the same way that when I reject God and go far and go into my sins, it's the same idea—making it more about me and making myself more important. But God is still waiting and will welcome us back. He is saying that your identity, who you are, is in Christ, not you. It's not about what you do to save yourself but about Christ and His love and mercy.

When we look at the church and we look at how this parable was told, we see people that are looking down on others and being offended by the world. Sometimes it's good to look and ask how we can get our message out to some of those people that are offensive to us so that they can learn about our Savior, and learn that our Father is forgiving, He and seeking them and waiting for them. But sometimes we're too uncomfortable and a little too self-righteous to share with those people that are different than us. We sometimes think and feel the church is a place for all those righteous people. That's kind of what people think. But we should understand it's more like AA, where we walk in and say "I'm a sinner." That's what we do every week. We confess our sins. We ask for God's forgiveness. As we do that, we understand that we are forgiven by our Savior.

When we can do that, when we see it's all about Christ and His love for us, we can be at peace in the world. We don't have to get so angry at everything that is going on. We don't have to get so torn up and out of shape when we have been sinned against, because our Savior has forgiven you and me. We don't deserve His love and forgiveness, so we can show that love and forgiveness to others.

Here at Morrison, we spent a long time on Sunday nights going through this book (and Sunday mornings) called Unoffendable that talks about how when you understand the grace of God, when you understand you are forgiven, you can go out and forgive others and have this world-changing view that God is here, that He is helping you, and you're forgiven, so you can forgive others. We don't have to be so angry and fed up and we can understand the Lord is here and helping us.

We know that our world is broken. We know that relationships are difficult. We know that we are sometimes that younger son and/or that older son. But what this parable is really about is that our loving Father is here. This parable is left open-ended. The older son is out there and we don't know what happens. The father is pleading with him to come back. This is what we get to do with those who may be lost, like the younger son,

or the older son who is focusing on self-righteousness. We get to go and represent our Savior, to share that love and forgiveness, and to tell them that their Father is waiting there with open arms, to forgive and to give them Christ. And it's all by grace alone, to give peace now in this life and 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.