

THE HARDEST PART

An All Too Familiar Story

SERMON NOTES
MARCH 30, 2025

*The Fourth Sunday in Lent
Scripture: Luke 15:1-3; 11-32*

LUKE 15:1-3; 11-32 (NRSV)

¹Now all the tax collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to him. ²And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, "These fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them."³ So he told them this parable:

¹¹Then Jesus said, "There was a man who had two sons. ¹²The younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the share of the wealth that will belong to me.' So he divided his assets between them. ¹³A few days later the younger son gathered all he had and traveled to a distant region, and there he squandered his wealth in dissolute living. ¹⁴When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that region, and he began to be in need. ¹⁵So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that region, who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs. ¹⁶He would gladly have filled his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, and no one gave him anything. ¹⁷But when he came to his senses he said, 'How many of my father's hired hands have bread enough and to spare, but here I am dying of hunger! ¹⁸I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; ¹⁹I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands.'" ²⁰So he set off and went to his father. But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him. ²¹Then the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' ²²But the father said to his slaves, 'Quickly, bring out a robe—the best one—and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. ²³And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate, ²⁴for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!' And they began to celebrate.

²⁵"Now his elder son was in the field, and as he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. ²⁶He called one of the slaves and asked what was going on. ²⁷He replied, 'Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf because he has got him back safe and sound.' ²⁸Then he became angry and refused to go in. His father came out and began to plead with him. ²⁹But he answered his father, 'Listen! For all these years I have been working like a slave for you, and I have never disobeyed your command, yet you have never given me even a young goat so that I might celebrate with my friends. ³⁰But when this son of yours came back, who has devoured your assets with prostitutes, you killed the fatted calf for him!' ³¹Then the father said to him, 'Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. ³²But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found.'"

This is perhaps the most familiar of all of Jesus' parables. It is commonly called the parable of the prodigal son. How does it affect your hearing to call it the parable of the loving father?

How does the context of Jesus' telling this story give us insight into its meaning?

What is Jesus telling us through the parable?

With whom do you identify most in the parable?

Does anything in the parable trouble you?

Do you feel any tension between grace and justice in this story?

Fred Craddock says after hearing this parable, "There is a condition worse than death, to be lost; there is a condition better than life, to be found." What do you hear?