

Biblical Background

LUKE 15:1-3, 11-32

GEOGRAPHICAL SETTING: This Gospel takes place at a gathering of Jesus and his disciples (students) who have come together for table fellowship. This was the sort of meal that Jesus was often invited to in the Gospels. This scene could be set at the meal in the previous text that Jesus was invited to attend to celebrate the fact that the well-known local tax collector/official Matthew (also known as Levi), had just renounced his former trade. They were celebrating his call to follow Jesus with his friends and with Jesus. The religious leaders would have seen Matthew as a wayward son that Jesus is embracing. This scene would have taken place inside a room with a door access to the outside area where the religious leaders could gather and comment on the scene as it unfolds.

TERMS: Pharisee Pharisees were the dominant religious sect of ancient Judaism. Jesus and most of his followers considered themselves Pharisees in that they agreed that holiness (good religious practice) began at home and around the family table.

Teacher of the law A teacher of the law, also known as a biblical lawyer, was an expert in the Law of Moses and therefore an expert in the Bible. The greatest accolade one could receive was to be called a "teacher" - this is the word that translates "rabbi" in Hebrew. The Law of Moses, or the Torah (the first five books of the Bible) was the most important religious material you could study. It contained the laws.

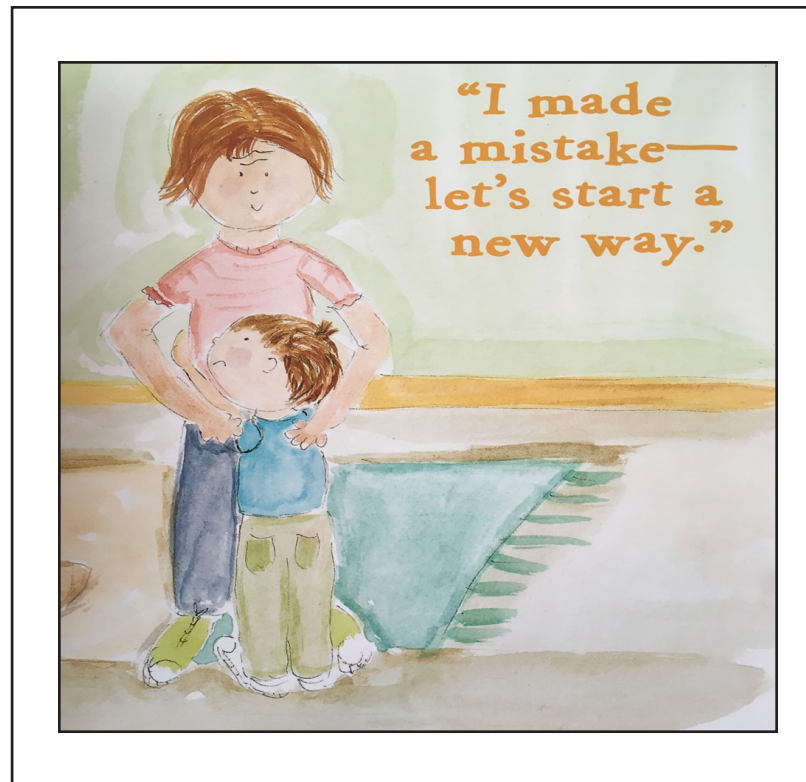
Prodigal This is a word used to describe being "reckless and wasteful". Some say the younger son was a prodigal - he was reckless and wasteful with his inheritance. Others see the father figure in the parable as a prodigal - willing to be reckless in reaching out to both of his wayward sons.

CULTURAL INSIGHTS: A parable is a story drawn from the common life of Jesus that always shocks the listener and leaves the listener in doubt as to its precise meaning. Jesus uses parables to teach large groups that he will not have an opportunity to teach ever again. In biblical times, if there was a father with two sons, both would receive an inheritance upon the passing of the father. The shock of the story is that the YOUNGER son demands his inheritance before his father dies. Additionally the OLDER son does not intervene and try to reconcile the Father and the younger son. He stands by silently and is guilty of non-action as a result. Therefore, both sons are at fault. The older son is wayward with the Law and the younger son is wayward without the Law. Both are not honoring their father. It is also significant that the father RUNS to greet his son as great men in the ancient world did not run. This would have been a delightful shock and surprise for those listening to the story. The younger son would have been quite shocked and afraid of what his Father running to him might mean.

INSIGHTS INTO MEANING: This parable is open ended. We do not know if the older son goes into the celebration or not. The father has risked everything to meet and greet his younger son outside the village and bring him back into family fellowship. He has also risked everything to meet and "beg" his older son to come into the house to celebrate the younger brother's return. One character has come from death to life, but we are not sure about the second. "Which son are you?" is the question that Jesus leaves the listener with. His point to the religious leaders was the blindness and the fault of the older son, with whom most of them would have associated themselves.

Family Activities

SHARING THE MISSION AT HOME
AND IN THE WORLD



QUESTION OF THE WEEK: Reflect as a family on times when forgiveness has been offered to each other. What difference has it made? Who can we reach out to in our families, extending a hand to bring them home?

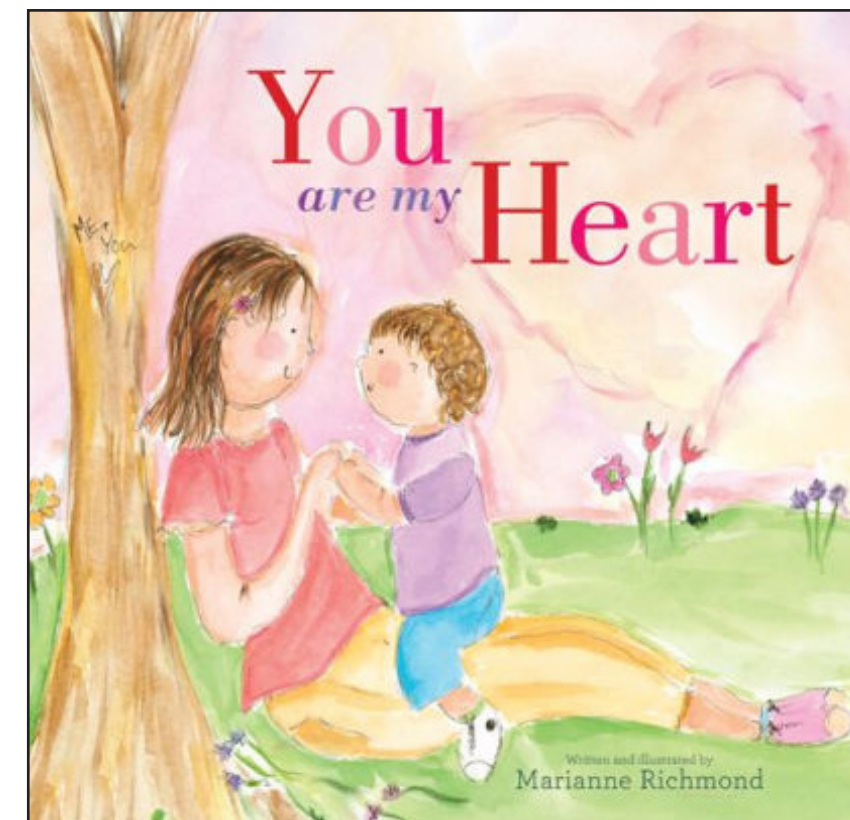
GOSPEL CHARACTER QUALITIES: FORGIVENESS
UNION IN GOD'S LOVE

FAMILY ACTIVITIES: Create a plan for inviting a person who is disconnected from your family or your faith community to participate in an event or dinner. Brainstorm together as a family, ways to reach out to those who may be yearning to come home.

CYCLE C 4TH SUNDAY
OF LENT

Living Grace

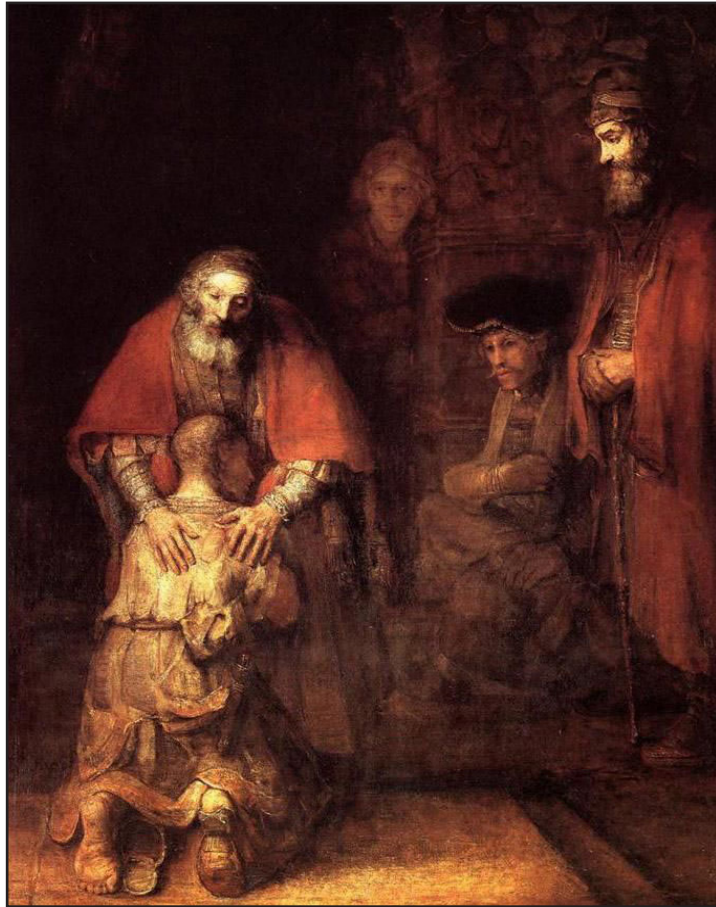
"THOSE WHOSE HEART I FIND MY HOME IN"



You Are My Heart is a sweet, inspiring book that beautifully expresses the emotions we all feel as parents, putting into words some of the magical aspects of the parent-child bond. The mother finds her child in giggles, puddles, snuggles, and play. They are one in heart, and they share joyful and awe-inspiring moments together for all of life. "You're my joy beyond joy, a gift from the start. You are my blessing and love - you are my heart."

Art & Faith

CELEBRATING THE BEAUTY & TRADITION
OF SACRED ART



THE RETURN OF THE PRODIGAL SON
Oil Painting by Rembrandt van Rijn ~ 1669
Hermitage Museum ~ St. Petersburg, Russia

EXPLORING THE ART:

This masterpiece is an example of Rembrandt's status as one of the best artists in the history of art. Completed during the last years of his life, The Return of the Prodigal Son is a famous life-size oil painting and considered one of the greatest paintings of all time. Rembrandt was clearly moved by the parable of The Prodigal Son, as he spent decades on the theme making a variety of drawings, etchings, and paintings. Here he captures the fullness of the Christian idea of mercy with amazing psychological and spiritual insight. Expressive lighting and coloring, the simplicity of the setting, and the magic of his technique, all increase the dramatic intensity of the event and help us to feel the full impact of human sympathy. The arrangement of the figures, the lack of movement, the shadowy light, and the warmth and harmony of the color palette, all contribute to the extraordinary sense of quiet and a tender forgiveness that is almost tangible. Rembrandt's artistic genius enables him to perfectly reflect the son's sincere repentance as well as his father's loving and merciful response.

DRAMATIC INTENSITY

Sunday Gospel

LUKE 15:1-3, 11-32

Tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to listen to Jesus, but the Pharisees and scribes began to complain, saying, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them."

So to them Jesus addressed this parable: "A man had two sons, and the younger son said to his father, 'Father give me the share of your estate that should come to me.'

So the father divided the property between them.

After a few days, the younger son collected all his belongings and set off to a distant country where he squandered his inheritance on a life of dissipation.

When he had freely spent everything, a severe famine struck that country, and he found himself in dire need.

So he hired himself out to one of the local citizens

who sent him to his farm to tend the swine. And he longed to eat his fill of the pods on which the swine fed, but nobody gave him any.

Coming to his senses he thought, 'How many of my father's hired workers have more than enough food to eat, but here am I, dying from hunger.

I shall get up and go to my father and I shall say to him,

"Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you.

I no longer deserve to be called your son; treat me as you would treat one of your hired workers."

So he got up and went back to his father. While he was still a long way off, his father caught sight of him, and was filled with compassion.

He ran to his son, embraced him and kissed him.

His son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you; I no longer deserve to be called your son.' But his father ordered his servants, 'Quickly bring the finest robe and put it on him;

put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet.

Take the fattened calf and slaughter it.

Then let us celebrate with a feast, because this son of mine was dead, and has come to life again;

he was lost, and has been found.'

Then the celebration began.

Now the older son had been out in the field and, on his way back, as he neared the house, he heard the sound of music and dancing.

He called one of the servants and asked what this might mean.

The servant said to him, 'Your brother has returned and your father has slaughtered the fattened calf

because he has him back safe and sound.'

He became angry, and when he refused to enter the house, his father came out and pleaded with him.

He said to his father in reply, 'Look, all these years I served you and not once did I disobey your orders; yet you never gave me even a young goat to feast on with my friends.

But when your son returns who swallowed up your property with prostitutes,

for him you slaughter the fattened calf.' He said to him,

'My son, you are here with me always; everything I have is yours.

But now we must celebrate and rejoice, because your brother was dead and has come to life again;

he was lost and has been found.'"

Read-aloud video link:

YOU ARE MY HEART

Written by & Illustrated by Marianne Richmond

Making the Connections

FOR ADULTS

ALWAYS AT HOME IN THE HEART OF THE FATHER.

These are two powerful stories that truly get to the "heart" of things. In our children's story, a mother beautifully describes the unending bond between she and child. We hear that her child first comes to life in her hopes and dreams, and she never dreamt that she would receive so much back from her child. A beautiful bridge is built through which love, grace, and goodness flow for the rest of their lives. As the story continues, we hear how mother and child grow into a relationship of unity - very much the way that Jesus speaks to his apostles of his relationship with his heavenly Father, "The Father and I are one." The mother finds her child in giggles, puddles, snuggles, and play. They are one in heart, and they share joyful and awe-inspiring moments together for all of life. We also learn an unexpected thing, as the child asks, "Are you my mad too?" The mom responds a resounding yes, "because your mad leads me to patience and to grace as we learn to say, 'please forgive' together".

Jesus tried to get the religious leaders of his day to wake up and realize that "being religious" and "doing the right thing" are not the point of God's will for us. Jesus shared a parable, not just of a prodigal son, but a prodigal father. (Prodigal means "spending money or resources freely and recklessly; wastefully extravagant".) The story begins with a culturally unexpected action on the part of the father. In the first century (and today) in middle eastern culture, it would have been unprecedented for a parent to give away their resources before they die. What would have caught the listeners' attention in this story, was a father that was being not only generous, but also wasteful. He was giving from the resources that would have offered him safety and protection. Why would a father take such a risky action? The son also acted wastefully as he left his father and squandered his riches on activities that left him alone and in poverty. Jesus was making the point that more than righteousness, God desires that a person never be cut-off from life's essentials - care, food, and provisions for daily life. The most important thing is to keep people bonded together in grace and love, and then everyone will thrive and be cared for. It is not the job of religious leaders to stand at the gate and judge who is worthy of graces and provisions of love. It is not their job to decide who deserves the riches of the Father and who does not. Their job is to behave prodigally, or wastefully, running to others who have found humility in acknowledging their need for God, for love, for grace, and for family.

God runs to those who are receptive to love. He wishes to pour abundance into their lives. This Gospel story illustrates that the son never left his Father's heart. His father's love was unending, even though the son made terrible choices and dishonored his own father. When the son wished to return, the father "wastefully" illustrated that his love was always present by throwing a feast for the whole town. The son was then willing to fully receive the love that was always there. He acknowledged his need to receive that love, the prodigal love of the father. The older son responds much like the religious leaders of the day, by complaining that the father's love for the younger son was not deserved, nor was the celebration. Jesus was again making a point to the religious leaders - that this kind of love comes from within the heart. The love of God resides within us like a well, no matter what the circumstances - it never runs dry and is always available. The job of a spiritual leader is to help people open their hearts and share in the ocean of God's ever-present love with each other. The mission of Jesus is to awaken all of us to the ever-present resources of this love, building bridges to those in need. This is the bridge building that Pope Francis speaks of that marks of a follower of Jesus - the bridge of mercy.

The love of the Father is ever-present, just like the love of a mother for her child. As followers of Jesus, our job is to be one with the Father in a love that never ends, and to rejoice and celebrate its presence. Jesus invites all of God's sons and daughters into the realization that, to the Father each one of us is "my blessing and love - you are my heart."

Making the Connections

FOR CHILDREN

YOUR STORY: Have you asked your parents about their dreams of having you? What do imagine it was like? Have you ever realized how you are always in your parents giggles, snuggles, and play? How does that make you feel?

THE CHILDREN'S STORY: How did the mother and child in the story express their love for each other? What surprised the mother about with her relationship her child?

THE GOSPEL STORY: How do you think the father in the Gospel felt when his son was living recklessly? Do you ever wonder if your parents will still love you if you do something wrong? How do you think the son felt when he thought about the father? How do you think the son that stayed home felt about his brother? What does Jesus tell us in this story about the love of a father? What can we come to understand about how God loves us even when we wrong him and others?

What can we learn from this story? How will God respond when we seek to restore our relationship with him? How might we live differently if we really trusted in this limitless love?