

Easter in the Middle of Lent

**2 Corinthians 5:16-21 and Luke 15:1-3, 11-32 | Fourth Sunday in Lent |
March 30, 2025 | Pastor John Klawiter, preaching**

Grace and peace to you my friends in Christ,

Being a parent... man, it's a trip. I love it. But sometimes it can be hard. A test of patience.

Every day, my three youngest kids have a routine. We've gotta get out the door between 7:10 to 7:20 or else we are pushing it for drop-off at LILA.

Most days, I'm ready to go first and then I start strongly encouraging faster behaviors to get us out the door on time.

Except Thursday.

Taryn was home, and while I got ready to go, she decided to be sneaky. She got all three of the littles ready, with shoes, coats, and backpacks on at 7:10 exactly, and had them line up on the bottom of the stairs.

As soon as I opened my door to come down, I was greeted with a rousing chorus, in unison, of "Hurry up! Dad! Time to go! Hurry up!"

They thought they were HILARIOUS.

But I realized something, this "encouragement" didn't make me move any faster. I still had to do the things I needed to do. If anything, it made me feel more rushed.

Could it be possible that on most days, when I was the one yelling "hurry up", that it wasn't helping? Was I, the father, too pushy to get the desired results out of my kid?

Parenting is a lot of trial and error—trying to devise ways to get kids to make the right decisions and do what you expect from them. There's a lot of waiting. Life rarely goes according to plan.

Using such a deep familial example by Jesus gets at the heart of the challenges that would be so relatable to his audience.

What's more relatable to a Jewish audience than a story of sibling rivalry? Jacob and Esau, Cain and Abel, Joseph and his brothers.

Sermon Transcript

What can I possibly say that you haven't heard before? This story, so rich and full of tradition, what interpretation could I offer that makes you re-think or re-evaluate what you already know and love?

OR: What if you're listening today and you've never heard this? Or you've heard the reference of the "prodigal son" and didn't really know what it means?

Prodigal. Not to be confused with prodigy. This isn't some brilliant child genius. Prodigal means reckless—and remember that word because, in so many ways, there is a character much more reckless than the younger son in this story.

Just this week, I watched a show where one character incorrectly used the expression "and the prodigal son returns" to describe another character. He'd literally just been in the other room. He'd been gone for a minute, but not to do anything reckless or crazy.

If you're wondering why Jen skipped verses 4 to 10, there are two other parables of items being lost, found, and the ensuing celebration. But this one. The "prodigal son"—legendary.

Partly, it's one of those stories that makes the listener squirm.

Jesus is talking to... sinners and tax collectors. They want to hear what he says. We don't know exactly what is meant by "sinners"—but we do know that tax collectors are essentially getting paid by the empire to do their job. They have a negative perception because they'd be seen as traitors. How can you work for THEM? The evil empire?

Imagine you're the chief priests and scribes, then. They're grumbling at who else shows up. The mere presence of sinners and tax collectors disqualifies the message.

Then Jesus tells this story. It's likely his audience finds themselves in the parable and the sinners and tax collectors feel noticed, valued. They know that if this younger son could tell his dad: give me my inheritance, squander it all, hatch a plan to return, and then, actually be embraced—in fact, have his dad RUN to see him, then surely God must have a place for them in the kingdom.

The chief priests and scribes hate the judgment that they perceive thrown their way. They don't want the sinners and tax collectors to join them. They don't want to throw parties for new believers. Especially THOSE guys.

Sermon Transcript

And the father. Can you imagine a father actually acting this way?

The fatted calf? Is this a wedding or something and you've invited the whole town. Jesus, you're too much. This is OVER THE TOP.

And that's the point.

God, the father in this story, is the prodigal. God is reckless. God is extravagant in the grace bestowed to us. All of us. The prodigal Father is our prodigal God.

But there's more.

Pastor Matt Rawle, in his book *The Final Days*, encourages his readers to view all of the gospels through the lens of resurrection.

What happens if we re-read this parable looking out for clues of the resurrection?

This is what many Christians miss when it comes to Jesus. We Christians want the glory. We want the celebration of heaven. We love to say that we're saved and throw the party with the fatted calf.

And good for us. We should do that.

But too many Christians forget that resurrection can't happen without death. We skip Good Friday. In this story, the son is dead to the family. In Jewish tradition, he has no right to return and expect to even be hired as a servant.

That, however, is not what the dad believes. He says "this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found! And they celebrate."

Then, when the older son refuses to celebrate, the father reminds him of the value of his life: "this brother of yours was dead and has COME to LIFE; he was lost and is found."

Do you think this parable is about resurrection? About the power of living when we know that Christ has died for us?

That Jesus willingly suffered before Pontius Pilate. Crucified, died and was buried. He descended to the dead... and on the 3rd day he...

ROSE AGAIN. Resurrection

We keep living like the resurrection doesn't matter. Or that it only matters on Easter. We cling too tightly to our material possessions, our beliefs that we are entitled to power, prestige, or privilege.

Sermon Transcript

Jesus looks at us and nods towards the sinner and the tax collector—and what are we doing about them? Are we closing doors? Are we denying the humanity of others? Are we hoarding the grace of God for ourselves?

It happens subtly. We keep making small decisions, each day, little things that make us feel like we're better than others. That we are more righteous. More deserving. The more we learn about the reckless and extravagant grace of God, we SHOULD feel more like the younger son—left for dead. Instead, the temptation is to feel like the older son. That we've earned something better.

It's hard. New challenges face us.

The following day after the kids played their stunt on me, they fell back into old habits. We left at 7:25. I couldn't believe it. We narrowly made it on time. I was... frustrated. Why couldn't they just get it?

They were SO good the day before. The lesson was short-lived... a reminder of how hard it is to be patient. Patient enough to wait, every day.

Because life is unpredictable. Life is filled with resurrection.

We are prodigals. Recklessly thinking our way is the only way to understand God. We believe, so in turn, we're quick to say, "hurry up, let's go, come on, you'll be late!" Whether you've believed in the resurrection your whole life, are new to Faith, or are deeply struggling with where God fits in all of this, here's the good news:

God says, "it's ok. I'm waiting here by the fence—looking far off to watch for your arrival." Join the resurrection. Join the party. We rise up, with courage and bravery, to bring new life to each day. Amen