

The title for today's message is "*The Waiting, Loving Father*"

Luke said: ***Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him.***

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Today's parable is regarded by many as the greatest parable Jesus ever told.

Its a parable that fits in well with one of Luke's favorite themes; that Jesus has come to seek and save the lost, the poor, the outcast and the sinner.

The parable begins with a description of the loose, prodigal living of the youngest son.

First, he demands that his father give him his share of the property, allotted to him through his expected inheritance.

Now in making this demand, the son shows considerable disrespect towards his father.

This youngest son refused to wait until after his father died; he wanted his inheritance now as if saying to his father: "You're dead.

I want my inheritance to leave you and go a far country, with greener grass and a better life without both of you.

Yet, when he reached the far country, he was no better off. He spent all of his money; because he lived in a carefree, irresponsible way.

Even worse than that, after reaching rock bottom, he took a job looking after pigs.

Now for a Jew, to feed the pigs was one of the most degrading, unclean, horrible things to do; and was against Jewish law.

Many of us, perhaps all of us at one time or another, in our own ways, are like the young son in this parable.

In our sinful state, we too rebel against God, our parents, and other people who are in positions of authority.

Look, we too, like the prodigal son, try to run away from God, our families, friends and neighbors, or our responsibilities that we face in our daily work.

As the young son traveled into the far country, seeking his selfish wants; we too travel to far countries, all for pleasure and selfish reasons.

Many years ago now, the rock group the Rolling Stones sang a song titled: "I can't get no, - satisfaction."

This song could have been written thousands of years ago, at least this young son would have related to it because he couldn't get no satisfaction

The members of the Rolling Stones had their own difficulties getting satisfaction in their lives too.

They struggled with drug addictions, and moving from one broken relationship to another.

Living irresponsibly and rebelling only led this prodigal son to a state of mental, spiritual and physical death.

It led him to realize that it would be better back home as one of his father's hired servants; than it was looking after dirty pigs.

So he practiced a repentance speech that he would give to his father hoping for his father's acceptance once he returned home.

But much to the prodigal son's surprise, this doesn't happen. The father accepted his son as soon as he saw him coming home!

His father even interrupts his son's speech before he has the chance to say: "treat me as one of your hired servants."

Then, with great ceremony, the father welcomes his wayward son back into the family.

Now, according to the customs of that time, the best robe was reserved for distinguished guests and special occasions.

In other words, the son was loved, forgiven and completely accepted royally by his father.

No matter how far away the country is that we have gone to; no matter how great a sin we are guilty of.

God is like a loving, waiting, and welcoming father; who accepts, forgives, loves, and welcomes each one of us back; just as the prodigal son.

When the eldest son finds out his father has gone all out to celebrate his youngest sons return, he became furious.

Look, the eldest son had stayed home all these years; had worked hard with his father faithfully every day and obeyed him.

So how could his father do this he thought? Why would his father give such a royal welcome to this wayward son of his?

Now out comes the father to speak with his eldest son; to invite him to join everyone for this great family reunion.

However, all the eldest son is able to do is think of himself, and he refuses to forgive his younger brother.

Instead of the love and grace with which the father welcomed his son; the eldest son preferred the law, which condemned the wayward son.

To make matters worse, the eldest son was so jealous and selfish, he refused to call the younger son, his brother.

And when the eldest son talked to his father about his brother, he said: this son of yours, not my brother.

He then, out of jealousy and self-righteousness, makes a false accusation against his brother, he said:

“But when this son of yours came, who has wasted all his inheritance on prostitutes, instead of punishing him you killed the fattened calf for him!

Look, in the parable itself, all we are told is that the younger son: “wasted his inheritance in reckless living. Not on prostitutes.

This leaves it open-ended as to exactly what or who or how the younger son spent his inheritance.

In addition to the older brother’s self-righteousness and false charge against his brother.

There are times we too are like the eldest son. We know how he must have felt seeing all this love and attention given to his brother.

The eldest son must have been haunted and tortured by the question: Does it pay to be good?

He failed to see that his father’s love toward the wayward son went above and beyond a need for punishment.

Instead there was forgiveness and the opportunity for the youngest son to have a new, fresh start again, and without having to prove himself.

The unforgiving attitude of the elder son shut himself out of his father's home. Not his father nor his brother or anyone else.

Look, we can't have a relationship with God that excludes others. He wanted a relationship with his father, but not with his brother.

However, that was not possible, since his brother was back in the home, and if the elder brother couldn't stand to be in his brother's presence; then he couldn't come into the father's home.

There are those, even in the Church today, who, like the elder son, who find it very difficult, if not impossible, to live by love and grace.

They are good churchgoing, law-abiding citizens. And yet, they shut themselves out of loving, meaningful relationships with God.

All because they cannot tolerate or forgive the sinners whom Jesus Himself forgives and loves.

And many Christians today are like the eldest son, they sometimes prefer their prodigal sons and daughters to prove themselves before they are willing to love, accept or forgive them.

However, that is not what the father in our parable does, nor does our God! The true hero of our parable is the father.

You see, he is generous, loving, and patient, he treats both sons equally And fairly.

He gives his young son his inheritance early and allowed him to do what he wanted with it.

And he gave his eldest son everything he has for his inheritance. The father doesn't punish or reward his two sons for what they have or have not done; instead, he loves both of them equally.

Finally, the father shows that he is a gambler in that he accepts his prodigal son back without any conditions or strings attached.

The parable does not tell us whether or not the prodigal son was just using his father to benefit himself and afterwards go away back into a prodigal way of life.

But nonetheless, that is the gamble, the chance the father took because he loved his son and forgave him.

Even if that meant the son would take advantage of the father in the future; the father's love and forgiveness was always constant.

There are times when we are like the prodigal son and have wandered far away from God.

Yet, God our Father-Parent is generous with us, loves us, waits patiently for us, treats all of us equally, and gambles on us.

He too runs to welcome us back into his family with open arms, and rejoices when we have come back home.

There are also times when we are like the elder son. When we too are selfish, righteous and law-abiding.

When we human beings fail to accept, love, and forgive; God our Father does, so that we too, as recipients of his generous grace, are then able to do likewise.

Amen. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the Love of God the Father and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all. Amen.