Lent 4 Luke 15:1-3, 11-32
March 27, 2022 392-339-579-399

Celebrate God's Grace!
I. Rejoice in the grace YOU are enjoying.
II. Rejoice in the grace God shows to OTHERS.

Dear Christian friends,

The season of Lent is both SOMBER and SO COMFORTING. It's **somber** and RIGHTLY SO. We're making our way to Calvary and the cross. We're confronted with the ENORMITY of our sin and guilt. The only way we **could be saved** was by the "HOLY, INNOCENT, BITTER sufferings and death" of God's own sinless Son.

That's also what makes Lent SO COMFORTING. Where our ***"sin abounded (God's grace) did much more abound."*** Lent takes us to the HEART of the gospel – Jesus crucified and **risen**. Paul told us in the epistle reading, ***"The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved, it is the power of God."***

Jesus spoke this parable to ILLUSTRATE God's **amazing** grace. **Some** in the crowd rejoiced in that grace. **Others** just couldn't understand it. ALL of them needed it. This parable invites **each one** of us - CELEBRATE GOD'S GRACE! **As you celebrate** 1)rejoice in the grace YOU are **enjoying** and 2)rejoice in the grace God shows to OTHERS.

I. Rejoice in the grace YOU are enjoying.

Jesus tells three parables in this chapter – the LOST SHEEP – Lost Coin – and the this one, the Lost **Son**. To lose a **sheep** or **coin** is BAD ENOUGH. But to lose a child to a **life of sin heading** to hell – WHAT HEARTBREAK!

The details of this parable are SIMPLE ENOUGH. A man had two sons. The **younger** son was tired of living **at home**. He couldn't even wait for his **dad to die** to GET HIS SHARE of the inheritance. He goes to his dad and actually demands, ***"Father, give me my share of the estate."*** You want to SMACK this guy a **good one** and tell him to **take a hike**, right? But NOT HIS FATHER! He's not going to FORCE his son to stay **against his will**. He divides up his estate – and notice he GIVES BOTH sons **their share** of the inheritance.

WHO does this picture? **Finally** every sinner! God has been so good to us – SHOWING and SHOWERING His love on us in **so many ways**. Yet how does God get treated? **How** do our sinful natures see God? We want to BE FREE of God – **off** ON OUR OWN to live and enjoy life AS WE SEE FIT. God is not going to tell me **how to live** my life! God CAN'T CONTROL me – the language I use – the shows I watch, etc. I'LL DO whatever I want!

Doesn't this also picture Christians who FALL AWAY from Jesus? This son had experienced his father's **love** and **goodness** – yet he MOVES OUT. **How many** have been brought up in **Christian** homes – taught God's **Word** and **love** – yet they see being a Christian as a BOTHER and a PAIN. They want to BE FREE of God. So they stop coming to church. They have NO TIME for God. They say **"good-bye"** to God and MOVE ON **in their lives**.

The parable continues. The word prodigal means **wasteful** and SO THIS SON lived his life. He WASTES his inheritance – **wastes** his life. Then a ***"severe famine"*** hits. **From living** HIGH OFF the hog he ends up feeding hogs and wishes **he could eat** some of the pigs' food. God is willing to use TOUGH TIMES – He will put people THROUGH THE WRINGER – to get their attention and knock **some sense** into them.

"When he came to his senses." Pushing God out of your life – living in defiance of God – is INSANE. Ignoring God **doesn't make** Him DISAPPEAR. ***"What is a man profited if he gains the whole world yet loses his soul?"***

The LOST son returns to his father. That's what repentance is – TURNING FROM our sin and back to God. He is CONTRITE – sorry for his sin. He makes NO EXCUSES – "I was dumb – I made a **mistake**." ***"Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight."*** "I had no business doing that. I was defying and rebelling against BOTH God and you." He accepts the CONSEQUENCES – ***"I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired servants."*** "Because of my sin you don't owe me ANYTHING."

BEFORE he couldn't stand **being a son** of his father. NOW he's be content just to be a ***"hired servant"*** working for his father. But his father – OH WHAT GRACE to **celebrate**! His father had never given up on him. He's been watching for him – waiting – HOPING. He sees his son **off in the distance** and he GOES RUNNING to welcome him home! He smothers his son **with kisses**. With WORDS and ACTIONS the father makes clear that he still loves his son and COMPLETELY FORGIVES him. There's no lecture – no probation – no REJECTION! ***"The lost has been found! The dead is alive! They began to CELEBRATE."***

See here the INVITATION TO CELEBRATE and rejoice in the **grace** YOU are enjoying. WHAT MESSES we make in our lives and in our relationship with God. EVERY WEEK we come back to church and confess, ***"Father, I have sinned against You."*** We make no excuses. We confess, ***"I am no longer worthy to be called Your (child)."*** God doesn't OWE us anything – but OH WHAT GRACE our Father lavishes on us!

Our **heavenly Father** is waiting – watching – LOOKING for us. He runs to meet us **here at church** IN SO SPECIAL A WAY. He answers our confession of sin **not** with a BIG SIGH or LECTURE but with His forgiveness **full** and free FOR Jesus' SAKE. Our **heavenly Father** still loves us! Isn't it so fantastic to hear those **sweet words** every week, "God, **our heavenly Father**, has been merciful to us and has given His only Son to be the **atoning sacrifice** for our sins"? He has forgiven **all** your sins. By the perfect life and **innocent death** of our Lord Jesus Christ He has removed your guilt **forever**. You are His own **dear child**"? God's grace and **forgiveness** are FOR ALL SINNERS and they cover ALL our sins.

With WORDS and ACTIONS God makes His love and forgiveness **so clear**. ***"Be of good cheer, your sins are forgiven you. As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us. The blood of Jesus, His Son, purifies us from all sin. We have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins."*** Then top that off with that PRICELESS GIFT of Holy Communion – Jesus actually giving us with **simple bread** and wine the very body and blood He gave into death on the cross ***"for the forgiveness"*** of all our sins.

This is often called the parable of the PRODIGAL or LOST son. But it's really about TWO LOST sons. As you rejoice in the **grace** YOU enjoy be sure to also…

II. Rejoice in the grace God shows TO OTHERS.

Jesus spoke this parable to a MIXED crowd. There were ***"tax collectors and sinners"*** who could easily see themselves in the **younger** son. There were also ***"the Pharisees and the experts in the law complaining"*** about Jesus ***"welcoming sinners and eating with them."*** They took Jesus ***"welcoming sinners"*** AS Jesus approving of their sins. Jesus NEVER did that. Jesus ***"welcomed"*** the OPPORTUNITY to talk to these sinners – to call them to repentance. He forgave their sins and opened up a WHOLE NEW LIFE for them. God's grace and forgiveness are NEVER GOD'S PERMISSION to **keep on** sinning. **Grace** and forgiveness give a WHOLE NEW DIRECTION to our lives.

These Pharisees couldn't rejoice in the grace **God was showing** TO OTHERS because they didn't see THEIR OWN NEED for God's grace. They are pictured by the **older** son who's FULL of himself and BITTER toward his father. Just look how he acts.

He finds out about the **party**. His GOOD-FOR-NOTHING brother **is home** and dad has welcomed him with **open arms**. ***"The older brother was angry and refused to go in."*** His father goes out to him and CATCHES a real earful from him. ***"Look, these many years I've been serving you, and I never disobeyed your command, but you never gave me even a young goat so that I could celebrate with my friends."*** What about the inheritance he's **already** received? This older son couldn't understand his dad's FORGIVENESS because he didn't see HIS OWN NEED for forgiveness.

As we enjoy **God's grace** FOR OURSELVES do we resent the **grace God shows** TO OTHERS? It's so easy to SLIP INTO being a **Pharisee** – the **older** son. "Father, I'm in church every week. I pitch in and help EVEN WITHOUT being asked. I've served on **many committees**. I give generously and **if I miss** a week I make sure I **make it up** the next week. I stay for Bible class AND EVEN GO to Lenten services! Father, don't You see ALL I'M DOING for You?"

Oh, and then there's those OTHER members – and we use that word member **loosely**. They might show up for Christmas or Easter or maybe a funeral or wedding. But do they ever OFFER TO HELP? Our budget would be in a **lot better shape** if they only gave their **fair share**. Do we sometimes think like that? Come Easter in a few weeks will we be thinking, "OH, THERE'S you know who! Probably won't see them again until Christmas. **I'll bet** they don't even give $20." DO WE THINK **like that** – or do we pray that God's **law and gospel** will TOUCH THEIR HEARTS and change their lives? Do we make sure we greet them – encourage them to **keep coming** to church?

Or maybe someone's in church who's **made** a REAL MESS of their life and it's common knowledge to all. Do we ***"mutter"*** like these Pharisees, "THE NERVE of them to show up in church!"? Or do we make sure we **welcome** them and encourage them with God's **love** and **forgiveness**?

Or there's a visitor in church. Do we just stare at them – especially if they SAT in **my pew**! – wondering what they're doing here? Or do we go OUT OF OUR WAY to welcome them – introduce ourselves to them – help them – encourage them and **invite** them to come back?

With the younger son we're told, ***"He came to his senses"*** and returned to his father. We never hear WHAT HAPPENED with this older son. Jesus is inviting each one of us to CHECK our **own hearts**. Jesus is inviting **each one** of us to CELEBRATE GOD'S GRACE – to rejoice in the grace **God is showing** TO US – and TO OTHERS! Amen.

Hymn #579 – "Lift High the Cross"