

**“Lost and Found”**  
**Text: Luke 15:11-24**

Prodigal – the word rings a bell! Teachings from Sunday School and traditional preachers taught us that this word is associated with a wayward son who has left his family and community to reckless living, squanders his inheritance but returns home to find that his father welcomes him with love and forgiveness. We know this story. We have heard it so many times. When I looked up the word “prodigal” in the dictionary, Mr. Webster tells me that it means “extravagant, wasteful, reckless and lavishly abundant.” To call this story the parable of the prodigal son is a misnomer. I’d rather call this the parable of the prodigals. The three major characters in this parable were all prodigals. Come to think of it - the younger son wasted his resources to reckless living; the older son abundantly used his time and energy to getting himself upright with comfortable living; and the Father extravagantly poured out his love to both of his children. This parable is rich and best captures all the important elements of life in relationship--grief, betrayal, trust, forgiveness, compassion, loneliness, jealousy, generosity, pride, and best of all, a welcoming love. It's the kind of story that goes deep and wide all at once and it should be revisited throughout life, since it has tremendous capacity to look at relationships in different angles and heal our wounds over and over again.

Let’s face it – family issues of sibling rivalry, favouritism, “I’m in-you’re out” dynamics – all play part in this rich parable. The younger son is driven by curiosity and a desire for independence to undertake a quest in a far away country. He is anxious, impulsive and precocious, wanting to leave home early even though he risks his father's life and health in order to taste that glorious freedom. No doubt, his decision profoundly disturbs his father and his community. In those days for a younger son to leave home and demand his inheritance upon leaving, was as if he was wishing his father dead. The ancient readers would have seen this as a violation of the commandment to honour your mother and father. What we are dealing here is something more than an adolescent rebellion, or defiant behavior, or rejection and betrayal of all that has been freely given--family, parenthood, community, life. So he took off with a fat sum of money but when he squandered all of his inheritance, the younger son lived and fed with pigs. NT Scholar Bernard Brandon Scott calls this “apostasy” – the abandonment or renunciation of his religion. Pigs were deemed unclean in the Jewish law and to eat with them

means the younger son drifted away from Torah and religious traditions. He became the lowest of the low.

Think, for a minute about the dutiful, older son who remained at home. The good son who stayed behind, did everything his father told him to do, was probably a little glad to see his annoying brother leave in the first place, and was more than upset to see him come back. We know that he was resentful when his younger brother returned home. Is it possible that he remained home not out of duty but because he was afraid of risks? And that he envied and resented his more adventurous and freedom-loving brother? Could some of us be like the older son – always doing the “dutiful” thing but scared of what’s out there therefore put on a persona of resentment and pride? I can see myself in the older brother. Not because I resent my siblings and wish they go away. But I am not a big fan of the high life – the adventurous, frivolous life out there. I don’t want to hurt the feelings of my parents. I love being home.

Accept it or not, we have been like all three prodigals in the story. We are like the young prodigal in so many ways – we have run away from various issues in life – we have tarnished our relationships with people we love; we have wasted our resources and talents to reckless living. At times, we could be like the older son - we have put in our time and effort in being perfect but also erecting walls of indifferences and callousness; we have given ourselves to unwanted pride and we could not even make ourselves “forgive and forget”. The question now is how do we come home again? And here is where some of us resonate with the father. Bernard Brandon Scott has a revolutionary interpretation of the father. In Jesus’ time, fathers are authoritative figures who are distant and remote from their children. To wait for a wayward child means that this father, in the eyes of the audience, is a fool and has little honour. When he saw the son coming home, the father ran to meet him. Scott says that this action is so unorthodox for the ancient people especially for fathers. To ran means to hike up his robe to knee length showing his legs which is an act of disgrace. To make matters worse, the father kisses his son – again another act that is so not fatherlike. Scott concludes *“this father behaves in ways that are typical of a mother who had to maintain close ties with her sons...This imaging of the father in the role of the mother challenges the fundamental male hierarchy as the model for understanding the sacred.”*

What would it mean for us to return, to come home again to love, forgiveness, acceptance? A return to home is a return to Love and a state of being loved. We come home, by first returning to ourselves and then returning to a life filled with compassion even as we recognize the compassionate embrace of God.

What about our church family here at BCUC? Where are we in the parable? Have we got that sense of welcoming love here at BCUC? What would it mean for us here to take this risky, boundary-less love into our lives? Is this the love we stand for as we nurture Ainsley and Zachary into this church family? What grudges would we feel compelled to give up? What prejudices and biases would start to melt? What healing of relationships might be born? What self-hatred could be disarmed and forgiven?

Did you notice too that the parable is open-ended? When the older brother heard about his brother's return, and the party being held, he became furious. He refused to go into the house where the celebration was taking place. The father left the party to beg his eldest to come in and join the party. At this point, the parable abruptly ended. The conflict between the brothers was left unresolved. If you will write act three of the parable, how would you create its ending? Scott gives us some wisdom to consider: *If the sons continue on with their established scripts, they are headed for a collision. One will kill the other. Or they can follow the father's script and surrender their male honour and keep on welcoming, accepting and being with the other. They have a choice between being lost or found, dead or alive.*" I always like a happy ending where the main characters will find a way to sort their conflicts and differences and then live happily ever after. I would like the sons to follow the father's script. I would like the older son to be moved by his father's compassion and forgiveness and in return, his bitterness and anger towards his younger brother will be replaced with acceptance and become buddies with his brother, even though it's a hard choice to make. I would like the younger son to truly repent, to be accountable for his wayward actions and humbly admit to his older brother and his father that he committed mistakes and that he will promise to be more responsible, to change for a better person. I would like the father to continue to love both sons unconditionally as if they were his best friends, to have an open communication with them, to listen to them, to guide them to the right direction and to teach them to surrender their male honour. What about you? How would you end the parable?

Let me close with a prayer by Bruce Sanguin he titles: “Only Kisses”

Holy One, your love for us is fathomless.

We can neither comprehend it,

nor can we ever penetrate its depths.

Yet we insist on measuring ourselves by the  
worst in us,

By the slip ups and the shame-filled  
moment, which imprison us,

Lock up life, and leave us languishing in  
death.

You call us from disgrace to dignity,

And await the return of our prodigal souls

A royal robe, and the finest champagne:

Instead of lessons to put us in our place,

You adorn our faces with kisses,

Reminding us who we are

In your welcoming eyes. Amen.

Sources: Inspired by the Sermons of Nadia Bolz-Weber , Kari Henkelmann Keyl; *Re-Imagine the World*, a book written by Bernard  
Brandon Scott and the BCUC Lectionary Group