

## THE PRODIGAL SON

Luke 15: 11-32

### Prepare to Hear the Word:

- This is a Parable about a compassionate, forgiving father.
- Jesus' listeners would have known that a younger son was entitled to one third of his father's wealth, but only when his father died.
- Jewish purity laws meant that Jews must have nothing at all to do with pigs because they were unclean.
- A son who asked for his inheritance would have been disowned by his family forever and a father who gave it to him would have been dishonoured in the community.
- View Rembrandt's painting of the Prodigal Son and notice that the father's right hand is shown as a woman's hand, his left is masculine. Rembrandt has picked up on the divine love of God which is as unconditional as "womb love."

### You will need:

- Puppets – father, 2 sons, 2 slaves, 3 friends, pig farmer
- Pigs, 3 or 4 and a fatted calf
- Country background
- Felt circles, bone and grey
- Ring, sandals and robe.
- A bag of money to represent the inheritance.

*When children are seated in a semi-circle ready to listen to the story, place the gold box/bag, containing the materials you will need, carefully beside you.*

*Roll out the road, place the Father's house at end nearest the backdrop, at the other end place the grey circle (foreign country) with a few pigs and a pig farmer in the centre. Bring the father and the two sons out and place in front of the house as you say:*

**There once was a man who had two sons.**

*Move the younger son over next to the father.*

**The younger son said to his father, "give me my inheritance now so that I may enjoy it."**

*Place the bag of money beside the younger son, say:*

**So the father divided his property.**

*Move the younger son a little way along the road. Move the father in front of the house.*

*Move the older brother off to the side (almost out of the scene).*

**The younger son gathered all he had and travelled to a distant country.**

*Move the younger son towards the end of the road*

*Bring the extra characters and put them with the younger son, say:*

**He spent his money on wild parties and having a good time.**

*Remove the friends and move the son into a space by himself.*

**Soon he had spent all the money his father had given him and he had nothing left.**

*Move the younger son to the grey felt circle beside the pigs, say:*  
**There was a severe famine in that country and he was hungry and poor.**

*Move the son close to the farmer, then remove the farmer as you say:*  
**So he went and hired himself out to a pig farmer to feed the pigs.**

*Indicate with your hand that the son is speaking, say:*  
**He was so hungry that he would have been happy to eat what the pigs were eating; but no one gave him anything.**

**When he thought about what he had done, he said to himself “how many of my father’s hired hands have plenty to eat, but here I am dying of hunger!**

*Move the son a little away from the pigs, say:*  
**I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands.”**

*Start the son on the road towards home, say:*  
**So he set off to return to his father.**

*Move the father a little down the road towards the son, say:*  
**While he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion;**

*Move both the father and son close to one another, say:*  
**His father ran and put his arms around him and kissed him.**

**His son said to him, “Father, I have sinned against you; I am no longer worthy to be called your Son.”**

*Place two slaves on either side of the father with a ring, sandals and a robe, say:*  
**But the father said to his slaves, “Quickly, bring out a robe – the best one – and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet.**

*Place the fatted calf near the father, say:*  
**Get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!”  
And they began to celebrate.**

*Move the elder son a little way away from the father, say:*  
**When the elder son came home, he heard music and dancing.**

*Move a slave over to the elder son, say:*  
**He called one of the slaves and asked what was going on.**

*Indicate with your hand that the slave is speaking, say:*  
**The slave replied, “your brother has come home, and your father has killed the fatted calf because he has got him back safe and sound.”  
He became angry and refused to go in.**

*Move the father over to the elder son, say:*  
**His father came out and began to plead with him.**

*Indicate with your hand that the elder son is speaking, say:*

**He said to his father, “Listen! For all these years I have been working like a slave for you, and I have never disobeyed your command; yet you have never given me even a young goat so that I might celebrate with my friends.**

**But when this son of yours who has wasted your property, returns, you kill the fatted calf for him!”**

*Indicate with your hand that the father is speaking, say:*

**The father said to him, “Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found.”**

**The Gospel of the Lord.**

**Response: Praise to you Lord Jesus Christ.**

### **I Wonder:**

- I wonder why Jesus told this parable?
- I wonder what Jesus' followers thought of this story?
- I wonder if Jesus was telling the story about the younger son or both the sons, or the father?
- I wonder if we are sometimes like the older son, or the father, or the prodigal son?
- I wonder why the father ran to meet the son and forgave him so easily?

### **The Prodigal Son**

**Luke 15:11-32**

Then Jesus said, ‘There was a man who had two sons. The younger of them said to his father, “Father, give me the share of the property that will belong to me.” So he divided his property between them. A few days later the younger son gathered all he had and travelled to a distant country, and there he squandered his property in dissolute living. When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs. He would gladly have filled himself with the pods that the pigs were eating; and no one gave him anything. But when he came to himself he said, “How many of my father’s hired hands have bread enough and to spare, but here I am dying of hunger! I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands.’ ” So he set off and went to his father. But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him. Then the son said to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.” But the father said to his slaves, “Quickly, bring out a robe—the best one—and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!” And they began to celebrate.

## Prepare to hear the Word:

## Teachers

- This parable is not simply about a thoughtless son nor is it about both sons. It is a story about a wonderfully compassionate and forgiving father who shows us the compassion of God.
- The father's response of compassion and hugging could be seen as an outflowing of "feminine" energy. The Hebrew word corresponding to the word *compassion* refers directly to "womb love" – the instinctive, fierce, unconditional, blind love of mother for child.
- The request of the younger son was outrageous. Even though on the father's death he may have expected to inherit his share of the estate, (one third), to seek it prematurely was to seriously dishonour his father.
- By giving in to the son's request, the father had gravely dishonoured himself, his family and indeed the extended family of the village.
- To Jews, pigs are unclean animals. Jews were not even allowed to touch pigs. When the son took a job feeding pigs, even longing for their food to fill his belly, it shows that he had fallen as low as he could possibly go.
- In the patriarchal culture of the time the father's response was both shameless and unthinkable on a number of scores:
  - he took the initiative*
  - he spontaneously reached out to a son who had publicly dishonoured him*
  - he disgraced himself by running*
  - he showed compassion publicly*
  - he embraced and kissed his son*
- The father did not listen to the son when he returned, he interrupted him after a few phrases. The father's response was not conditional on the son's sorrow or remorse. It was the father's unrestrained love that was at work and unconstrained love always calls for celebration.
- Reconciliation happens when the sinner turns towards God and accepts forgiveness.

*Together Towards Jerusalem John McKinnon 2006*

