

**March 30, 2025 – Revd Wim Kuiper**  
**Anglican Church Arnhem & Nijmegen**  
Reading: Luke 15.1-3, 11b-end

We all know this beautiful story as the ‘parable of the lost son’. But perhaps it is more adequate to call it the ‘parable of the two lost sons and their merciful father’. So this morning/evening we find ourselves, together with these two brothers, in God’s ‘lost and found’ department. My guess is that most of us will relate to the oldest brother, rather than to the youngest. But in any case, just as these two, we also tend to lose it every now and then. And so we are also continually in need of God’s search actions, and on what follows after our returning and repenting to him: his amazing grace; the fact that he continues to accept us as his beloved sons and daughters, no matter what. Throwing a party for us when we are getting home to where we belong, where we most deeply long to be; close to God, abiding in the love of Christ.

The father in this parable surprises us not only by his enduring love; by the fact that in his Kingdom mercy is clearly much stronger than justice. He also surprises us by giving the complete freedom of choice to his sons to lead their own lives in the way they think is best. So, he simply gives the youngest son what he asks for to live on his own, at a great distance from his father. This prodigal son seems to follow his more basic instincts without any long term planning. He looks for all the worldly pleasures he can get, and as long as it goes. Wrongly assuming that he will always enjoy a happy life in this way. But he ends up living a nightmare instead of living according to his Father’s dream for him. And luckily something inside him says; there is a home where you can still go back to. You have a father who still cares for you. And when he finally returns, he finds out that his father is infinitely more loving than he could have ever imagined; longing for his return, running towards him, embracing him, immediately accepting him as his own son and joyfully throwing a party.

Now the other son could have done the same thing but apparently he chose to lead a more sober and decent life, staying closer to his roots, the way he had been brought up and binding himself to the laws and regulations of his society, his culture and his religion. He must have felt himself much better than his wayward brother, more deserving his father’s love. But seeing the joy and love of the father towards the returning prodigal son, there is a darker side in him which comes to the fore. Some raw emotions of pride, self-righteous anger and envy are engulfing him. Emotions that we may well understand when we put ourselves into his position. Thinking about this rather judgmental brother, I was reminded of a survey that was commissioned by the Anglican, Episcopalian church in the United States to find out how Christians in that country are viewed by the others, people with other religions and none. Christians regarded themselves as compassionate, giving, loving and respectful. But many of the others came up with images of Christians as being judgmental, hypocritical, self-righteous and arrogant. Now this is of course about the image of Christians in the US and things are hopefully very different here around. We can also easily dismiss those findings as unjustified prejudice. But why not also use them to hold up a critical mirror towards us, as followers of Christ. We are of course still, just like anyone else around us, tempted to such negative emotions and attitudes that create a distance between us and our Lord. That make us into prodigal brothers and sisters in the same way as that second lost son in this parable. The one who did not seem as clearly lost as the other one, but proved to be so nevertheless.

And how does the Father react to this other prodigal? Again, not by rebuking him, by sternly pointing out his sinful thoughts, but by pleading with him to join the party. By explaining to him the abundance of his grace saying: ‘My son, (*my daughter*), you are always with me, and everything I have is yours’ (Luke 15.31). Does it work? Is it convincing? We don’t hear. The parable has an open ending. Thereby, the invitation is extended to all who are listening to it, including us here on this day.

An invitation to learn about ourselves by looking at these two lost sons, and perhaps by recognising ourselves in them to a certain extent. An invitation to grow in becoming like this loving Father. And

on this Mothering Sunday, we can of course equally apply the image of a loving mother. Loved with a love that may liberate us from any arrogance, envy and self-righteous anger, as well as helping, guiding us to stay clear from all those worldly temptations that may lead us astray. Love that make us compassionate towards all who are lost, helping them to find their way back to a truly happy, fulfilled and joyful life. Love that will continue to bring us and keep us in our Father's home, now and in eternity.

Amen