**Come to himself**

醒悟過來

Luke 15: 1-3, 11b-32 3/30/2025

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Today's scripture is a parable spoken by Jesus; the prodigal son is a familiar story that you must have heard, perhaps even mentioned or performed. But can you answer why Jesus told this story? Who were the people listening at that time? What was He trying to teach? What inspiration does it have for us? We ask the Lord to help us listen to the message He wants to give us at this very moment.

**Prayer for Illumination**

God of grace, Your mercy is vast and infinite, while our understanding is limited. When we hear Your words being read and preached, please open our hearts so that Your good news may penetrate to the deepest parts of our being. Renew us with the love of Your forgiveness and spark our imagination, so that we may share this love with others. In the name of Christ we pray, Amen.

**Context of the Story**

The prodigal son is the third in a series of three stories. The overall theme of the series is “lost and found.”

**The Parable of the Lost Sheep**

“There was a man who had a hundred sheep; one of them got lost. He left the ninety-nine in the field and went in search of the lost one until he found it. Once he found it, he joyfully placed it on his shoulders, brought it home, and then invited his friends and neighbors to celebrate.” (Luke 15:4-6)

**The Parable of the Lost Coin**

“Suppose a woman has ten silver coins and loses one. What should she do? She lights a lamp, sweeps the house, and carefully searches everywhere until she finds it. Once she finds it, she invites her friends and neighbors to celebrate with her.”

**The Parable of the Lost Son**

“Likewise, my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found! My lost sheep has been found! My lost silver coin has been found!”

Luke 15:1 adds: “At that time tax collectors and sinners all gathered around Jesus to hear Him teach.” The Pharisees and scribes privately discussed, “This man receives sinners and eats with them.” The author of Luke divides the listeners into two groups: 1. the tax collectors and sinners, and 2. the Pharisees and scribes.

The above explanation sets the context, letting us know why He told these parables and to whom. Now, let’s move into the details of the story.

Details and Core of the Story

For a long time, we have heard and understood this story as one about sin. We use these two sons as examples. The younger son is a bad son who leaves home and does even worse things, while the older son is the good son who always stays at home and never disobeys—an obedient, well-behaved child. But is that really all this story is about? In fact, the one who must return is not only the prodigal younger son; both sons are to return.

Is this story truly about the sons? Perhaps it is more about the father than the sons. Perhaps it is more about love and grace than about sin. Luke begins the account with “There was a man,” placing the focus on the father from the very start. Although we do hear about the sons’ journeys, it is always in relation to the father—the one who let his son go. If this were merely about the son, then it would primarily be about the son as the recipient of his father’s love.

The father’s love is so strong and great that it does not hold on possessively; He is willing to let go unconditionally and patiently wait. It is a love of forgiveness and a welcome home. He does not prevent us from going to distant lands; rather, He makes up for the time and life spent there. This is good news for those of us who have lost our way in far-off places; each of us will at some point find ourselves there.

Some people leave home, some demand their inheritance and then squander it, and others—like the older son—harbor resentment. That distant country is where we are lost and hungry; where we lose our sense of self, our meaning, our love, and our hope. In that far-off place, we are no longer truly ourselves. We will eventually realize that it is not the place we wish to be.

A father's love is so strong, so great, that it does not possess the other; rather, it is willing to let go unconditionally, patiently waiting. It is a love of forgiveness and a welcome-home love. He does not stop us from going to distant lands. On the contrary, it makes up for the time and life spent there. This is good news for those of us who get lost in distant countries; all of us will go there at some point.

Some people run away from home, some demand their inheritance and then squander it all, and others, like the elder son, harbor resentment. That distant country is where we are lost and hungry; we lose our sense of self, meaning, love, and hope. In the distance, we are no longer our true selves. We will eventually realize that it is not the place we want to be.

No matter why we go there, no matter what we do there, and no matter how long we stay in the distant country, we can always come home.

The key lies in that moment of our "awakening": "I will rise and go to my father, and say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you; from now on I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me as one of your hired servants.'"

Yet the father knows that love is the true way home. This is why the father ran to greet his son. He came to protect him from the attacks of relatives and neighbors, and to send him home safely—with a robe, sandals, a ring, and a feast, as a public expression of welcome.

Where are you? Are you leaving home? The father gives you freedom, and you receive love. Living in a pigsty? The father patiently waits. Are you coming home? The father will protect you; you have always been loved.

To those afar:

I think most of us, at some point in our lives, will believe in this illusion. We leave and go to a distant country. However, the life we desire and the person we want to become are not found in that distant country but are found through repentance. As the younger son experienced in the story, the distant country offers nothing but hunger and death. That is why, last week, Jesus so strongly and directly called us to repent. The Lord knows whether we go to that distant country—that is no longer the question. The real question is whether we will repent.

Repentance—the journey home—requires us to honestly assess our lives. We must examine who we are, who we are not, what we have done, what we have not done, and what factors or environments we have allowed to deprive us of a fulfilling life. Repentance does not merely mean proper conduct and kindness. Yes, sometimes we need only stop doing these bad things, but often our repentance is about breaking free from the failures, guilt, or regrets that bind us to the past, from the sorrow that prevents us from living fully, and from the fear that controls our lives and makes our world narrow.

Repentance is choosing no longer to run away from ourselves or our lives. It is also the profound realization that we are wasting our lives—spending time in the pigsty of that distant country. The younger son finally "woke up."

The younger son asked his father for his inheritance early, which, according to the tradition of that time, was tantamount to wishing for his father's death so that he could receive his share after death.

He ran off to a "distant country," as far away from home as possible, wanting to have his own way, to be free, fantasizing about freedom, and in doing so, he lost his roots and became lost. He indulged in lavish banquets, enjoyed the pleasures of sin, and wasted everything.

He became lost to such an extent that he found himself partying with the pigs, willing to eat the bean pods from the swine’s trough. But “nobody gives him anything,” not even pig food. This young man is completely lost and has failed. He has become like an animal; he is the lost sheep and the coin that was not found.

In the pigsty, “he came to his senses.” In losing everything, he came to see reality clearly; some people must fall into the depths of life before they can see the way out. He had nowhere to go, “about to starve,” so he had to get up and go home. He resolved “to rise and go find his father.”

It is also clear that the lost one in this story is not only the younger son. We also see how the older son became lost in his anger and resentment. Some people are at home, yet still lost; at home, yet have never experienced the joy and warmth of home. Estranged from themselves, estranged from their family—although they obediently follow every rule, they are not happy, unwilling to participate in the feast in their own home.

As we see in the story, the father’s love for his son allowed him the freedom to seek life, even after we have lost our way. God gives us the freedom to fail and fall. God also invites us home, invites us to participate. Our home is God’s presence.

“Lost and found” is a story of love. We not only see the lost son, but we also see a generous and wealthy father who, like God, lavishly dispenses his abundant love and mercy. When he “sees from afar” his lost son, he runs forward to embrace him, his eyes filled with love, 7:13 “seeing him and having compassion” with full sympathy. A father’s love for his child truly makes him run to greet his son, embracing him with his arms and then kissing him. His son acknowledged his sin, and the father instructed his servants: “Quickly bring the best robe for him to wear, put a ring on his finger, and shoes on his feet; bring the fattened calf, kill it, and let’s have a feast and celebrate! For my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and was found.” Then everyone celebrated with a feast.

The father did not ask his son where he had been or what he had done. No criticism, no condemnation—just great joy that he had returned. However, we might not agree with this outcome, for it offends our sense of justice—how is it that the prodigal son did not receive the retribution he deserved, but instead received grace?

Embracing the younger son does not mean rejecting the older son. Jesus’ love for tax collectors and sinners does not negate that He also loves others. The father’s love is generous and accepting.

God seeks to save the lost and wayward; it is the love on the cross. It is a kind of love that not only waits for you, but even runs toward you from afar. The road home is paved with compassion, forgiveness, and love—a road filled with hope and faithful grace. The road home is the path to God’s eternal love.

When we finally experience God embracing us and taking us home, when we submit and kneel down—just like in Rembrandt’s “The Return of the Prodigal Son,” when you lay your weary head upon God’s heart—you were lost, but in God you have been found.

It is not only the prodigal younger son who needs to return; it is the story of two sons returning. In fact, it is the story of two sons, and even more so the story of a compassionate father.

Animals and money may be lost, and we may also lose our way as people—people can go astray. “Lost, astray” is the story of humanity; “lost and found” is the gospel story.

Place these three parables of lost and found, the entire series, between Jesus’ call for disciples to leave everything and follow Him (14:33) and the teaching that one cannot serve both God and money (16:13). It tells us that only when we come to our senses, experience how deeply God loves us, and see that He waits to seek the lost children and bring them home, can we truly enjoy God’s real presence in His house and joyfully, without complaint, follow the Lord.