“Prodigal Kingdom” A sermon based on Psalm 32, Corinthians 5:16-21, and Luke 15:1-32 at the First Congregational UCC of Onekama, Michigan on the Fourth Sunday in Lent, March 30, 2025 by the Rev. Alison Andrea Young.

The “Prodigal Son” is a story many of us learned about in Sunday School. Like Aesop’s Fables it was meant to leave us with a moral teaching. The prodigal son was a bad person. He took the money his father gave him and wasted it, then came crawling back home when he was homeless and starving—literally surviving on the pea pods left for the pigs to eat. At least that’s what I remember from what I was taught. The word “prodigal” has a thoroughly negative connotation for most of us.

We have here in the Gospel of Luke, an apt description of the cosmic “Lost & Found” department. Jesus’ parable of the “prodigal son” has been discussed and told so much over the years that perhaps it seems hard to find any new meaning in it. As I mentioned in my opening comments, the standard description of this story concentrates on the “lostness" of the younger son. The description then goes on to highlight the father’s forgiveness of him nonetheless.

What if we look at it another way? At a “thy kingdom come, thy will be done” kind of way? What if instead of concentrating on the son’s “lostness” we concentrate on his “found-ness?” It is the son’s “found-ness" that this story is about, I think. It is not a story so much about the fact that the father recognized his own son--a son he had been waiting for and looking wistfully down the road for those many months fearing the worst; but it is a story about the fact that the son recognized himself. It is, in short, a story about self-discovery—about finding oneself.

When the son is in the distant country--he does spend recklessly. Why wouldn’t he? He had never had to fend for himself before. He knew nothing of earning a living–a country boy in the city--is fair game. It is a story older then the Bible—a story older than time itself. In addition, the scripture reminds us that once the son had spent everything--circumstances conspired to make his lot and everyone else’s worse for "a severe famine took place throughout the country and he began to be in need." (v. 14)

All things being equal, then, even if he had not already spent his portion—with a severe famine in the land—he would not have been able to survive long, anyway. He COULD have gone home right then—he could have thrown up his hands in despair—but he didn't. He actually acted quite responsibly—he got a job. The younger son, in the process of performing this job—-finds himself. The scripture says it quite literally: "But when he came to his senses." (v. 17) When he experienced the self-discovery that he could work like a slave—and survive—he realized that what he had done before was actually sinful. For how could he know that squandering his money was bad—when he had never had any money to squander—-or a place to squander it? How could he know about acting in a responsible way when he had never had any responsibility? In short, how could

he find himself, until he knew that he had an actual self to lose? Until he knew that he was unworthy. As he says, “I will say. ‘Father I have sinned against heaven and before you and I am no longer worthy to be called your son;’" How could he

"come to himself" as the scripture so literally says, unless he first lost himself? He must "go away from himself” in the filth of the city to find himself.

The father, practicing what we would today call “tough love," waiting at the end of the road straining his eyes against the glare of the sun knew all these things—but he also knew, that if the son came home again--he would have

had those experiences that would help to clearly define him-to give him a sense of

responsibility--he knew that if the son came home-he would be a self-actualized

individual-he would most literally be “Found." So, when the son at long last makes

his way home and makes his confession, the father has already moved past that

confession--he knows already that if the son has made it this far, has pulled himself up by the bootstraps and come home, the son has found himself and is indeed

contrite. So, the grateful Father almost brushes the son’s confession aside in his

frenzy of excitement. He hastily exclaims, “Quickly get out the robe and kill the fatted calf-let us eat and celebrate, for this son of mine was dead and is now alive again; he was lost and is found " (vv. 22-23) The throbbing pulse of the Father’s worst fears are carried in this statement-for him the son was dead--it was his worst fear-for him the son was lost--it was his worst fear-but now that is all changed

for the “Lost has been Found." The “prodigal” has come home.

We, too, often have to lose ourselves to find ourselves. We are all prodigals in that way. We all waste pieces of our divinely gifted lives, and often it takes a dramatic loss, to help us find our way back. This is why every Alcoholic Anonymous meeting ends with everyone holding hands and reciting the Lord's Prayer. In this way, they and we, are living out the part of the Lord’s Prayer on which we are focused today: “Thy Kingdom Come. Thy Will Be Done.” The kingdom in which we find ourselves, could be described as a “prodigal kingdom.”

Not only because we often behave in wasteful, prodigal, ways; but because the word prodigal has another meaning—

Webster’s Dictionary’s secondary meaning of *prodigal* is as an adjective: prodigal [ˈprädəɡəl]

ADJECTIVE

1. having or giving something on a lavish scale.

"the dessert was crunchy with brown sugar and prodigal with whipped cream"

*synonyms:*

[generous](https://www.bing.com/search?q=define+generous&FORM=DCTRQY) · [lavish](https://www.bing.com/search?q=define+lavish&FORM=DCTRQY) · [liberal](https://www.bing.com/search?q=define+liberal&FORM=DCTRQY) · [unstinting](https://www.bing.com/search?q=define+unstinting&FORM=DCTRQY) · [unsparing](https://www.bing.com/search?q=define+unsparing&FORM=DCTRQY) · [bountiful](https://www.bing.com/search?q=define+bountiful&FORM=DCTRQY) · [copious](https://www.bing.com/search?q=define+copious&FORM=DCTRQY) · [profuse](https://www.bing.com/search?q=define+profuse&FORM=DCTRQY) · abundant

Are there any better words than these to describe the Kingdom of God???

[generous](https://www.bing.com/search?q=define+generous&FORM=DCTRQY) · [lavish](https://www.bing.com/search?q=define+lavish&FORM=DCTRQY) · [liberal](https://www.bing.com/search?q=define+liberal&FORM=DCTRQY) · [unstinting](https://www.bing.com/search?q=define+unstinting&FORM=DCTRQY) · [unsparing](https://www.bing.com/search?q=define+unsparing&FORM=DCTRQY) · [bountiful](https://www.bing.com/search?q=define+bountiful&FORM=DCTRQY) · [copious](https://www.bing.com/search?q=define+copious&FORM=DCTRQY) · [profuse](https://www.bing.com/search?q=define+profuse&FORM=DCTRQY) · abundant ?

The Kingdom of God is prodigal with all of these attributes, and is thus prodigal--abundantly full-- with unconditional, unimaginable Grace! And we, as prodigals, can only confess along with the younger son in our Luke passage today: “Father I have sinned against heaven and before you and I am no longer worthy to be called your child.” And God, who knows our needs before we do, will take these areas of our "lostness" and work the divine will through them, so that, indeed, “Thy Will Be Done.”

As it says in our psalm for the day, Psalm 32, verse 5:

*5 Then I acknowledged my sin to you,  
   and I did not hide my iniquity;  
I said, ‘I will confess my transgressions to the Lord’,  
   and you forgave the guilt of my sin*.

Paul says much the same thing to the Christians in Corinth in our epistle lesson

today. He writes,

“*All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; 19that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us.” Verse 19*

The Kingdom of God is fueled by a prodigal amount of God’s will of reconciliation and a prodigal amount of God’s love. We, and all of our prodigal family, friends, and neighbors, are forgiven, embraced and welcomed there when we truly find ourselves through the act of contrition and confession.

Author, Kate Bowler, as the prayer to go with a devotion called “For the Exiles” in her book Good Enough, writes this:

*“God, thank you for moving the center of Your kingdom to be with those who are rejected, just so they could belong. Encircle me in those very arms of Your love, that my restoration might be so complete, so pure, and genuine that it radiates love to others in a way that gives them the same standing–the right to receive and give love and care, simply by virtue of their humanity. Amen.”*

How hard it must have been for the younger son, who had put himself into exile from his family, both physically and spiritually, to face going home, wondering if he could still belong, if he would be welcomed! Truly, it was God who moved the “center of the Kingdom” to be with him—a prodigal, abundantly full, kingdom for a prodigal, often wasteful but contrite, people . . .”Thy Kingdom Come. Thy Will Be Done!” Amen—“May it Be So!”

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