

Good Friday 2026
Homily – Saint Joseph Parish
Father Craig Looney
“The Prodigal God”***

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The Parable of the Prodigal Son is widely regarded as one of Jesus' most well-known and profound teachings on redemption and forgiveness. Also called the Parable of the Forgiving Father, it highlights a father's unconditional love for his repentant son, concluding a trilogy on lost things alongside the Lost Sheep and Lost Coin.

In his book *“The Prodigal God: Recovering the Heart of the Christian Faith”*, Presbyterian Pastor Timothy Keller (September 23, 1950 – May 19, 2023), argues that the Parable of the Prodigal Son is actually about two lost sons—one rebellious, one self-righteous—and a Father who loves them both with reckless, extravagant, grace. That makes the parable a compelling Good Friday Meditation.

The Parable of the Prodigal Son (*St. Luke 15.11-32*) is the Gospel appointed in the Book of Common Prayer for the Ninth Sunday after Trinity. Jesus was often criticized for associating with tax collectors and outcasts, and people on the fringe of society. The religious teachers were especially critical of Jesus having a meal with people they called sinners. Jesus responds by telling them this parable...

The man in the story had two sons. The younger one demanded his father give him his portion the estate. That was a shocking and disrespectful request, because he was treating his father as if he was already dead.

With his money in hand, he sets off to a foreign country, where he wasted everything in “wild living”. He reaches rock bottom before coming to his senses and starting the long journey home. Along the way the young son rehearses a speech he hopes will convince his father to show him some mercy and let him go to work in the field with the hired help.

The father sees his young son in the distance. He then does something that is also shocking...he runs out to meet his young son. Older men did not run out to meet misbehaving children. He doesn't give his young son the chance to give his speech. Filled with compassion, he embraces his long son, kisses him, and has the servants bring clean clothes and prepare a feast.

What about the older son? He was out working the field when he is told his younger brother has returned home. He became angry with his father for welcoming “this “son of yours” home with open arms. He doesn’t call him “my brother”. He refuses to go in to the feast, even after his father tells him he should be happy...”this brother of yours” who was dead is alive again; he was lost and is found.

Dr. Keller writes...

...“Most readings of this parable have concentrated on the flight and return of the younger brother—the “Prodigal Son.” That misses the real message of the story, however, because there are two brothers, each of whom represents a different way to seek acceptance into the kingdom of heaven.”

The younger son is “lost” in a far away country (Gentile Territory) where he engages in immoral and self-destructive behavior. He has to resort to the ultimate indignity for a Jew...feeding pigs...to survive. His mistake is in thinking he can earn back his father’s love. We’re left to wonder what the young son thought when his father unconditionally welcomed him home.

The older son is “lost” in his own home. He feels he he is morally superior to others. He feels he is entitled to his father’s assets because he has “slaved” for him all these years. He hasn’t obeyed his father out of love, but to control him. Dr. Keller points out the older brother is really worse off than his younger brother. His pride in his good and moral character has created a deeper wall than any outward sin. He is left with an empty and joyless existence.

In his book, Dr. Keller calls God the “Prodigal”. God is “wastefully extravagant”. He pours out his grace, love and mercy recklessly, beyond anything we deserve. God’s grace is “prodigal”, and it is “reckless”, because it is given to us freely even though we don’t deserve it, regardless of our past.

The Parable of the Prodigal Son is about the father’s love (his grace), freely given to both of his sons. But it was a costly grace. The father recklessly gave everything he had to both of this sons. He loved them equally and unconditionally. The younger brother couldn’t get his father to love him less no matter how “bad” he had been. The older brother couldn’t get his father to love him more be being “good”. Neither brother really understood the father’s love.

Good Friday is about confronting the sins that put Jesus on the cross. Sin is not something we like to think about much less talk about...but it is sin that has brought us to where we are now. Dr. Keller writes that God's outpouring of grace requires radical repentance of our sins, and trusting entirely in God's unmerited favor. We have to be honest with God and ourselves of the things that caused us to get "lost" in the first place.

Good Friday is the ultimate expression of God's reckless and extravagant outpouring of his love for us through the death of his Son Jesus on the cross. Jesus paid the ultimate price for restoring humanity to the father.

He has redeemed us from sin and death through the shedding of his blood. There is no question Good Friday is the darkest day in human history. There is no humor in a brutal and very public execution. There is hope. Good Friday is ultimately about life...not death. Jesus has healed and changed our lives and restored our broken relationship with God our Father in the only way he could...by recklessly giving up his life.

The Parable of the Prodigal Son teaches us a very important lesson. We cannot get God to love us more by being "good". We cannot get him to love us less by being "bad". We do, of course, try to live our lives in ways that are pleasing to him. God our Father truly is wastefully, carelessly, recklessly, extravagant, in pouring out his grace and mercy on us. His grace was costly...it cost Jesus his life.

In the final chapter of his book, Dr. Keller quotes a passage from Isaiah 25.6-8...

..."On this mountain the LORD Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples, a banquet of aged wine--the best of meats and the finest of wines.

On this mountain he will destroy the shroud that enfolds all peoples, the sheet that covers all nations.; he will swallow up death forever.

*The Sovereign LORD will wipe away all the tears from all faces; he will remove the disgrace of his people from all the earth.
The LORD has spoken."*

Jesus has done for us what the older brother in the Parable of the Prodigal Son should have done for his younger brother. He left his father's house to come looking for us, so we would not have to make

the long journey home alone...it's a journey we could not complete without his help.

And it is Jesus who brings us into Our Father's house to the reckless extravagant banquet he has prepared for us...where we experience God's love, compassion and unexpected mercy and forgiveness... where he reconciles us to himself through the shedding of his Son's blood. Jesus did all of this for us...out of unconditional LOVE!

We who were dead are alive again; we who were lost are found.

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