

IX Trinity 2026

Sermon – Saint Joseph Parish

Father Craig Looney

1 Cor. 10.1-13 St. Luke 15.11-32

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“A Tale of Two Brothers” might be a better title for today’s Gospel than “The Lost Son”.

Presbyterian Pastor Timothy Keller’s book *“The Prodigal God: Recovering the Heart of the Christian Faith”*, was the inspiration for our Good Friday Meditation. Dr. Keller argues we miss a key lesson in the Parable of the Prodigal Son when we focus our attention only on the Prodigal or Lost Son.

Dr Keller writes: *“Jesus does not divide the world into the moral “good guys” and the immoral “bad guys”. He shows us that everyone is dedicated to a project of self-salvation, to using God and others in order to get power and control for themselves. We are just going about it in different ways. Even though both sons are wrong, however, the father cares for them and invites them both back into his love and feast.”* (Page 51)

The Lost Son is the third part of a Trilogy that includes the Lost Sheep and the Lost Coin. In the Lost Sheep, a farmer has a flock of one hundred sheep. When one wanders off, the farmer goes out searching until he has found his lost sheep. Then he tells his friends to *“Rejoice with me, for I have found the lost sheep”*. (Luke 15.6) In the Lost Coin, a woman has ten silver coins and loses one. She lights a lamp so she can see better and searches her house until she finds the lost coin. Then she tells her friends and neighbors, *“Rejoice with me, for I have found my lost coin.”* (Luke 15.8)

Dr Keller writes there are similarities in all three stories: something is lost—a sheep, a coin and a son. In each story someone loses something and gets it back. And then there is a great celebration. The third story is different. In the first two...someone “goes out” and searches for that which is lost. In the Lost Son...no one goes out looking for him. Dr Keller writes as startling as this is, it is an intentional element of the story. Jesus is inviting us to ask the question: *“Well, who should have gone out and searched for the lost son?”* (Page 90)

Dr Keller goes on to say Jesus knew his Bible thoroughly, and he knew that at its very beginning it tells another story of an elder and younger brother—Cain and Abel. In that story, God tells the resentful and proud older brother: *“You are your brother’s keeper.”* The older brother in the Lost Son should have gone out looking for his younger brother, but he did not. (Page 91)

The Parable of the Prodigal or Lost Son is the compelling story of two brothers who are both deeply loved by their father. But the two brothers do not have it in their hearts to show the same kind of love their father shows them: one is rebellious...the other is full of hatred.

The younger son demanded his inheritance early, left home, and wasted everything he had on reckless living. His father’s gifts and money were more important than a father-son relationship. He came home because he was starving and reached rock-bottom. But he is wrong to think he is no longer his father’s son and worthy of his father’s grace and love, which he thought he had lost forever.

The older son is bitter and self-righteous. He refuses to join in the celebration..he disrespects his father and shows hatred and contempt for his brother. He is wrong because he treats his relationship with his father as a business transaction rather than love. He expects “payment” for having “slaved” for his father. In the end, he is more distant from his father than his younger brother, even though he stayed at home.

We like stories with a happy ending and we might conclude from Dr Keller the Lost Son has no happy ending. That’s actually not the case. The Lost Son (The Tale of Two Sons) is about loss and redemption...our loss and redemption. God is always ready to welcome us home with open arms, but we have to start the journey home, and with genuine humility join in the banquet prepared in our honor.

“A Tale of Two Brothers” is the story of God’s forgiveness, love and compassion. The two brothers in the story represent all of us and the choice we have to accept God on his terms...or ours. God’s way makes the journey home easier. The choice we make will ensure the story has a happy ending?

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