

***Restoration***

One day when a father came home, he sat down to relax and read the paper. His son had other ideas. The playful boy continually pestered his father. The frustrated father – tired of his son's nagging - took a page of the newspaper with a picture of the world – and tore it into pieces. "Son, go into the other room and put the world back together." Moments later the boy returned. He had taped the world back together. The surprised father asked: "How did you do that so quickly?" "It was easy," said the boy. "You see, on the other side of the world was a picture of a man, and as soon as I got the man straightened out – the world was OK too!"

The wisdom of this child saw the key to restoring the world – was through the man. How true indeed!

Have you ever seen something that was restored? Maybe a car, a boat, furniture, antique guns, or even artwork? It's amazing to see a "BEFORE" & "AFTER" of something that has been in the hands of a MASTER.

**RESTORATION has two parts:**

- Removing the past – the old – the effect of non-use, use, abuse, neglect and time.
- Restoring to like new condition – where "the imprint of what has been" is no longer visible. Where the old is now able to be what it had been before!

Jesus Christ is in the RESTORATION BUSINESS:

He can take shattered dreams and breathe life back into them – restoring them once again into dreams filled with vision, hope, and future.

Jesus Christ can come into your life and remove the tarnish, the blemish and whatever is covering it and make it real again! Life in a relationship with Jesus Christ is a life that is truly restored.

In today's Gospel lesson – Jesus tells his followers a parable about a man who thought that life without his father would be better than life with his father. There are some, who, for whatever reason, have tried to live life without God. It is not important whether it is just for a moment, a day, a month, a year, years, or a season of your life – but it is long enough to have learned that something is not right – life is not working like you planned.

This rich and wonderful parable of today's Gospel has 3 main characters that most of us can relate to:

The Father - Father is God.

The Son that ran away – often called the Prodigal – well, that could be you and me.

The Son that stayed and gets mad at the Restoration – That might also be you or me!

This entire parable – both parts of it – is about restoration and love.

The youngest son – takes his inheritance and leaves home. To put it plainly - he took the money and ran. Since he was the younger son – we was entitled to one-third of the estate – but not until the death of his father. We don't know why he wanted the money or why he had to leave – but he did, despite the shame that it brought to his father, his family, and to himself. By his taking the money – he was declaring his father dead – and taking the property and money for himself.

He wasted his entire inheritance on partying...he spent it all. He was left with nothing! The country where he was living was struck with a severe famine – leaving him penniless, destitute; to put it simply - he was not just in want – he was desperately in need.

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The money – or the blessings, that this young man squandered was only possible in the first place because of his relationship with the father. The life that he had led prior to the event of his demanding his inheritance was a result of being in relationship with his father. When it all ran out – he was left with nothing – especially without his father – for he had forsaken that relationship by demanding his cut of the estate.

Those blessings don’t mean a whole lot when we aren’t in relationship with God, for then – we have to try to find happiness...contentment...peace... and make a life in and through those things. You know what – **it just doesn’t work!!**

The blessing of relationship with the Father came to an end. The son sought his own future in other things and not in the love of the father – and **he felt the consequences of not being with Him**. Let’s face it – this is a perfect example of: **you reap what you sow!**

While seeking pleasure and fortune, the young son ended up being far from home. Any country that he would live in that was not Israel – would most certainly be non-Jewish – or Gentile. These people couldn’t be Jews – for they raised pigs. He was no longer living among his own. He was a poor, outcast alien. This boy was so far from the relationship with his father it was as if they were on opposite poles of the earth. That became his inheritance - the result of being out of relationship with the father. This young man was at the point where even what the pigs were eating looked appetizing to him. I would venture to say that he was not receiving a decent wage – wouldn’t you?

Where are his dreams now? Tarnished, not shiny any longer; his dreams are gone, like vapor. **He had gone from palace to pigpen**. He had hit bottom! I don’t know personally where the bottom is, but I know what it is.

The bottom is – where an awakening happens and you see the great difference between – where you are and where you are supposed to be.

- Where you see the gap in your life – because of living without the Father
- Where you determine to get back to where you belong with the Father
- Where you determine that you have had enough... that you have lost enough
- Where you get up and begin the Journey to the father...

While at the bottom – he realized "I’ve sinned!" He saw the effect of sin was much more than “missing the mark,” and his sin cost him more than he ever imagined. The Gospel tells us that he came to his senses. He realized his sin and then he longed to be made “as a servant,” willing to take the lowest place and do the meanest work. It once was as if he said “**any place rather than home,**” but now was saying –“**there’s no place like home!**” When things are NOT going as planned – It’s a great time to ask – why not?

As he walked back toward home – his expectations were low – hoping only to become a servant in his father’s house. He made his way toward his father’s house – and fortunately for him - his father didn’t see it that way! He didn’t even have to complete the trip because when the father saw his son coming – he ran to meet and greet him.

Hear the words directly from today’s Gospel: **Luke 15:20-24** “*And he got up and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him, and felt compassion for him, and ran and embraced him, and kissed him. "And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.'* "But the father said to his slaves, 'Quickly bring out the best

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*robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet; and bring the fattened calf, kill it, and let us eat and be merry; for this son of mine was dead, and has come to life again; he was lost, and has been found.’ And they began to be merry.”*

Let me just say that it was beyond an elderly Jewish man’s dignity to run, although the love of his son could take priority over dignity after what had taken place. Considering the normal clothing of the day, the father would have had to pull up his “skirt” to run. Can you just picture a grown man trying to run in floor length robes?

In a brief moment – he was restored! Just think about what was next.

- The best robe in the house that belonged to the father himself – would be marking the return of his honor.
- The ring probably a family signet ring became a symbol of reinstatement to son-ship in this well-to-do household.
- Slaves did not normally wear sandals, they carried and tied a master’s sandals. With this the father is saying, “**No, I won’t receive you back as a servant. I’ll receive you only as a son.**”

While he hoped for reconciliation with his father, he could not have imagined a full restoration of his previous relationship. **The father did not need to speak words of forgiveness to his son; his actions spoke more loudly and clearly! All of the stuff** – the tarnish on Him, the dirt from living and eating among pigs, the shame and the guilt was washed off him and removed. Immediately – His dreams were restored. He once again had hope and a future. The past was removed and the future lay ahead of him. He had come full circle - from the pigpen to the palace. He had experienced restoration in full!

His dreams were restored. Dreams that had been shattered, that were lost to time and squander, dreams that were lost from being out of touch with the father, dreams that were lost while living a life of sin. His hope was also restored. The relationship with the father was restored because all the while you are gone he is looking for you.

The beautiful robe, the ring, and the festive banquet symbolize the new life -- pure, worthy, and joyful -- of anyone who returns to God. That is the way that God the Father is with sinners. He will accept you as you are – with the stuff from your pigpen all over you, but he loves you too much to leave you that way!

- He will call for a celebration
- He will put His robe of righteousness on you
- He will give you His ring of royalty on you
- His will give you sandals of freedom from condemnation

All a sinner has to do is come home today – to repent and come back to the Father.

But that is not the end of the story – there is the eldest son’s somewhat harsh reaction to his prodigal brother’s return and to the lavish party his joyful father throws. The father who had been wronged forgave. But the eldest son, who had not been wronged, was unforgiving. His un-forgiveness turns into contempt and pride. And his resentment leads to his isolation and estrangement from the community of forgiven sinners.

In this parable Jesus gives us a vivid picture of the character of God and what God is like. God is truly kinder than we could ever be. He does not lose hope or give up when we stray. He rejoices in finding the lost and in leading them home. What a sharp contrast between the Father and the older brother who came home from working in the field and heard what was happening, and got angry. The older brother is

a perfect example of the attitudes of the Pharisees and the teachers of the Law. They had the same attitude toward the sinners as the older son had toward the younger son. Similarly the Pharisees and teachers of the Law were angry with the message Jesus was proclaiming. They did not like the idea that people from outside their nation as well as outcasts and sinners in the nation were to be a part of the kingdom. Like the older son who refused to go to the feast, the Pharisees refused to enter the kingdom Jesus offered to the nation of Israel.

**Isn't it marvelous how the father went out and pleaded with the older brother to go to the feast?**

Once again we see an example of God's willingness to reach out to sinners – if they just respond to His love. Didn't Jesus eat with Pharisees as well as sinners? Jesus did not want to exclude the Pharisees and teachers of the Law from the kingdom. The message is an invitation to everyone.

The older brother was angry because he had never been honored with a feast even though, as he said, "*Listen! For all these years I have been working like a slave for you, and I have never disobeyed your command.*" Those words betrayed the fact that the older brother **thought he had a relationship with his father because of his work – the things that he did.** He served his father not out of love but out of a desire for reward. He even thought of himself as being in bondage to his father.

- How much this son is like the legalistic Pharisees who ritualistically kept the 'Law of Moses.'
- How similar this young man is to the "rich young ruler" who told Jesus in Mark chapter 10 that he had kept the Commandments from his youth. Jesus replied that he lacked one thing – and that he had to have the faith to sell his possessions and give to the poor, then "*come and follow me.*"

**The father** pointed out that the older **son** had had the joy of being in the house all the time, and now he should rejoice with the father in his brother's return. The words, "**You are always with me and everything I have is yours,**" suggest the religious leaders' privileged position as members of God's Chosen People. They were the recipients and guardians of the covenants and the Law (see Romans 3:1-2; 9:4). Rather than feeling angry, they should rejoice that others were joining them and would be a part of the kingdom. Instead, he could not bring himself to say 'my brother' and spoke contemptuously of "*this son of yours.*"

We have today an example of three people – a father and two sons and through this wonderful example -

- We see the power of forgiveness.
- We see the danger of self righteousness
- The richness and humility that comes with repentance

Not too long ago – John Schlitt – the former lead singer of Petra, stood here in this church and reminded us through his powerful testimony that God loves the sinner – but hates the sin. He told us that "there is no sin that is too big that cannot be covered by the blood of Jesus - through repentance."

Jesus gave the choice to each one of us – which brother will we be?

- Will we be the self righteous older brother who doesn't see the need to be cleaned up and renewed?
- Or the repentant sinner – who longs to be restored – who longs to serve the Kingdom of God, out of gratitude for the gift of forgiveness that we don't deserve?

I close with the immortal words of John Newton – a slave trading sea captain – who turned his life around – by the grace of God and was restored.

**Amazing Grace! How sweet the sound  
That saved a wretch like me!  
I once was lost, but now am found  
Was blind, but now I see.**