

Celebrate! The Prodigal Has Returned!

There are a myriad of reasons for people to celebrate. They may include the desire to build community, to foster a sense of gratitude, to create memories and traditions, or to mark the reaching of a milestone. In some instances celebration erupts out of a fortunate turn of events. When the circumstances seem least favorable, the storm clears, and the light shines in.

In the Gospel of Luke, we read of such events. Jesus shares three parables detailing the loss and the somewhat unexpected recovery of three valuable items. The first is a sheep that is separated from the rest of the flock and is lost in the “open country” (Luke 15:1-7). Despite having ninety-nine other sheep, their owner searches for the lost sheep until it is found. The second is a valuable coin that likely represents one tenth of a woman’s dowry (Luke 15:8-10). She tirelessly searches her home until it too is found. Finally, Jesus tells of a son who demands his father give him his inheritance early (Luke 15:11-32). His intention is to leave home, never to return. After squandering his entire fortune, the lost son is forced to sleep in a pig pen and eat their slop. Coming to his senses, he makes his way home to his father who has been longing to embrace his son upon his long awaited return. What makes each of the stories so wonderful is the ecstatic response in light of each astonishing discovery. In each instant the owner gives an invitation to rejoice and celebrate the return of the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost son.

Forgiveness and its result - reconciliation - are the aim when relationships are in an unfavorable condition. When wrongs drive a wedge between two parties and cause separation, pain, and bitterness, forgiveness aims to bring the parties back together. True forgiveness approaches the repentant wrongdoer with open arms. Its goal is full restoration. The formerly prodigal son was embraced by his father and fully restored as indicated by the robe, ring, and shoes. Regardless of the outcome, forgiveness is not an option, but an obligation. Most importantly, as we forgive “one another, as God in Christ forgave” us (Eph 4:32), let us rejoice and celebrate when a wrongdoer repents.

Luke 15:22-24 (ESV) - *“But the father said to his servants, ‘Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet. And bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate. For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.’ **And they began to celebrate.**”*