

# “Extravagance”

Luke 15:11-32

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This is the story about lost sons. The younger son is prodigal. The elder son is bitter. Both sons are lost.

The word “prodigal”, in part, means to spend money and resources recklessly, profusely, and wastefully. That’s how the younger spent his part of the family inheritance. The word prodigal is related to words like profuse and lavish. However you define the word precisely, the prodigal son wasted his money on what the scripture text calls “dissolute,” “loose,” or (KJV) “riotous” living.

I imagine the relationship between these siblings was complicated. There’s a lot about these characters Jesus doesn’t say, but he doesn’t have to. We get the set up. We know something about families. We’ve watched soap operas like “Sanditon,” and—we have families of our own. We recognize sibling rivalry. And we’ve heard our own children squabble. If my sons said “That’s not fair” once, they said it a thousand times.

Since this story is called “The Parable of the Prodigal Son,” we might think that he—the prodigal son—is the star. But he’s not.

Notice that there are two scenes in this story: Scene One co-stars the Prodigal Son. Scene Two co-stars the Elder Son. And the star of both of these two scenes is their father.

And despite the fact that both of these characters have behaved or are behaving in unlovable ways, the father loves them both anyway. The father and his welcoming love is the star. The father—prodigal in his lavish love—is the hero, the Christ-figure, the point.

The father loves these complicated sons both radically and exactly as they are. I don’t know if this story is about “radical belonging” or “radical hospitality,” but there’s something radical and beautiful about this father’s extravagant, long-suffering love.

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But both sons are full of argument:

The prodigal son plans to repent of his wayward, *prodigal* living. He plans to apologize to his dad. He practices his ‘please-forgive-me’ speech; he’s making his case. He will tell his dad that he was wrong, and he will ask his dad to take him on as a lowly hired hand.

The young son never has a chance even to open his mouth. His Father, who saw him approaching, ran to him, and wrapped him in a Welcome-Home-Hug.

The elder son has an argument, also. Simply put: *This is not fair. This party. This welcome. This royal treatment. It’s not fair.* (And he’s right.)

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And both sons are right. *You have wronged me*, the father could say to his younger son. *And, you are right that you don’t deserve to be welcomed home.*

And to the elder son, the father could say, *You are right. This isn't fair. That boy has offended this family and it would be fair to cut him off and send him away.*

But this isn't a story about what is and isn't fair, this is a story about something else. This is a story about what's not expected. This is a story about something bigger. This is a story about God's mercy.

Both sons are flawed characters. Neither is perfect. But the father loves them both *anyway*.

*And that's exactly Jesus' point.* That's the kind of parent God is: abounding in steadfast love and mercy.

God is always eager to forgive us. No matter what we've done to injure God and neighbor, God is able and eager to forgive us. God welcomes us—no matter what. God loves us—no matter what.

God's love is extravagant. God's love for the prodigal son, for the elder son, for you and me, for the world, IS EXTRAVAGANT!

We get Jesus' point: That is how God loves the world, with grace.

*But do we get Jesus' sideways point?* As the father in this story loved his sons, this is how we are called to love one another.

May God help us.

AMEN.