

“Forgiveness-The Knot that Holds Family Together”

Theme: Stories that Change the World

Scripture: *Luke 15: 1-2, 11-24*

Things I'd like to remember from today's sermon:

Meditation Moments for Monday, June 16 – As we finish up our study of parables, read Matthew 13: 1-23. We read this parable the first week of this sermon series. Inside this parable we find that Jesus gives us his reason for using parables. Remember that these parables were stories that could be understood by the simplest and most uneducated people, but they required a desire to hear, to understand, and a willingness to ponder their meaning. And there was a measure of faith that was required. The religious leaders and skeptics often did not understand what Jesus was saying. Sometimes the disciples didn't understand at first either.

- Can you see and hear Jesus at work in today's world? If so, how? How would you explain this parable to a bunch of city kids who don't know anything about sowing a field? What modern analogy would you use?
- What did Jesus say in this passage about why he spoke in parables? It was not that people would not understand, but speaking in parables would itself be a way of separating those who had earnest hearts, willing to listen, and those whose hearts had been hardened and who only came to criticize.

Prayer: *God, I pray that my heart might always be open to you, and that you would help me understand the parables, and your truths and will for my life. Amen.*

Tuesday, June 17 – Remember we learned that the context of a parable is important to understanding its meaning. Read Luke 15:1-2 where we find the context of the parable of the prodigal son. The three (or four, depending on how you count them) parables of Luke 15 are meant to address the question of why Jesus associated with sinners, and in at least one parable, to speak to those who criticized him for it.

- Read Luke 15:3-7, a parable we looked at several weeks ago. Who is represented by the lost sheep? If God is the shepherd (Jesus calls himself a “good shepherd” elsewhere in the gospels and God frequently is referred to as a shepherd in the Old Testament, as in Psalm 23), what does this parable tell us about God?
- Read Ezekiel 34:1-6 and 15-16. How does heaven respond when one lost sheep comes home? How are people like sheep who wander from the flock? Do you know any lost sheep that God might use you to bring back home?

Prayer: *Lord, use me to draw near to your lost sheep and see them as you see them. When I get caught up in my own worries and struggles, give me strength to move beyond myself to server your people. Amen.*

Wednesday, June 18 – Read Luke 15:8-10.

- What is the most valuable thing you've ever lost? How did you search for it? Did you ever find it? If so, how did you feel? The coin here would have been worth a day's wages – for someone struggling to survive, this would have been a tremendous thing to lose. This woman actively searches for this lost coin.

- What does this parable tell us about the heart of God? About the mission of the church? How does thinking about something valuable you've lost help you understand this parable?

Prayer: *God, give me, and our church, a desire to search for lost people to bring them home. Help me to see them as valuable, created and loved by you. Help me to see myself this way so I can see it in others. Amen*

Thursday, June 19 – As we prepare to read the climactic third parable about the lost in Luke 15 – the parable of the prodigal son, note that this parable is really two parables in one – one which teaches about lost children, and the other that teaches about the Pharisees – the frequent subject of his parables. Re-read Luke 15:1-2.

- Now Read Luke 15:11-12. The property divided was primarily the family farm – land – that the younger son proceeded to sell – which would have been irresponsible and would have grieved the father, while affecting the family business. Read Luke 15:13-16. How is this boy's story like that of many people today?
- Look over your notes from Sunday's message. Have you ever been the prodigal? Read Luke 15:17-20a. How does hardship sometimes move us toward God? In what way do we see repentance here? Would the boy have repented as long as everything was going okay? Read Luke 15:20b-24. What do you notice about the father in this passage? What is he like? What does he feel? What does that tell us about God?

Prayer: *Gracious God, sometimes I have been the younger son and run far away from you. Sometimes I have been the older son and been jealous of the lost when they get a party. Help me to know that whichever I am, I am invited to the party. May I except your invitation and share it with others. Amen.*

Friday, June 20 – Read Matthew 18:28-35– The parable of the prodigal son is, in many ways, about forgiveness. Today's parable is about this as well. With his enormous debt forgiven, Jesus said, the servant breathed a huge sigh of relief, and then spotted someone who owed him about 100 days' wages. He demanded payment on the spot, and when that debtor pleaded for mercy, he refused and had the man imprisoned. His attitude and his actions made it clear that he didn't understand, or truly value, the mercy the king had showed to him.

- Have you ever been in a situation where you or another person received mercy and forgiveness, yet found it hard to extend that to another person? What inner factors too often make that characteristic of us as humans? How can taking in God's forgiveness over time transform us so that we can forgive others as we have been forgiven?
- Sometimes it bothers us that Jesus seemed to say God will not forgive us unless we forgive others. Pastor Myron Augsberger noted, "This is not a legalism, but states the expectation of responsible persons whose moral sense of responsibility will call them to express the forgiveness towards others that they have experienced from God." In what ways does God's generosity in forgiving and restoring you change how you see yourself, and prompt you to be generous toward others who have wronged you?

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, you gave up so much in order to reach me with your forgiveness. Help me to accept and value that gift, and to be more forgiving toward myself and others in my life. Amen*

Saturday, June 21 – Read Colossians 3:5-14 – Let's finish this week with forgiveness again. In these verses, the apostle Paul pictured a set of attitudes and behaviors that are woven together into a distinctive way of life. Forgiveness cannot and does not exist by itself—it requires a willingness to live beyond malice, and to bring large amounts of honesty, compassion, humility and above all love to bear on our conflicts and hurts.

- Scholar N. T. Wright wrote: "Supposing there was a town in which everybody behaved in the way described in verses 5–9. And supposing, a few miles down the road, there was a town where everybody behaved in the way described in verses 12–17. Which town would you rather live in?" Jesus offers all of us the opportunity, beginning here and now, to live forever a life characterized by compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, forgiveness and love. As you live more and more into the kingdom life God has called you to, in what ways are you experiencing freedom to be like Christ as you "put on the new nature"?

Prayer: *Lord God, I choose the qualities you offer to grow in me to be the template, the pattern, of how I live. But I'm a work in progress. As I relate to others who are also "works in progress," help me to extend the love and forgiveness you give me to them. Amen.*

Family Activity: Blow up one balloon for each family member. Place them in the center of the room. Invite each family member to choose one along with a marker. Ask each person to draw pictures or write words on the balloons representing something they have done wrong. Read I John 1:9 aloud. Explain that this means that no matter what we do, we can tell God we are sorry and God will forgive us. Begin a time of prayer, asking God to forgive what is written on your balloon. After you have prayed, have each person pop his or her balloon, representing God forgiving and forgetting your sin. Thank God for forgiving our sins.