

Sermon for The 4th Sunday in Lent

Date: March 31, 2019

Location: St. John's Lutheran Church, Austin, MN

Old Testament: Isaiah 12:1-6

Epistle Reading: 2 Corinthians 5:16-21

Gospel Reading: Luke 15:1-3, 11-32



Sermon Text: Luke 15:1-3, 11-32

Sermon Title: A God Who Runs

Introit: Psalm 51:2-6; Antiphon: Psalm 51:1

Hymns:

LSB 915 – Today Your Mercy Calls Us

LSB 609 – Jesus Sinners Will Receive (v. 1,2,4,6,7)

LSB 696 – In God, My Faithful God (v. 1-3, 6)

Liturgy:

Divine Service I, p. 151



Pastor James Groleau
St. John's Lutheran Church
1200 13th Avenue NW
Austin, MN 55912
Office: (507) 433-2642
Shepherd@JamesPlace.net
StJohnsAustinLCMS.org
FaceBook.com/StJohnsAustin
Twitter.com@StJohnsAustinMN
FaceBook.com/Shepherd.James.Groleau



Text: Luke 15:1-3, 11-32

All the tax collectors and sinners came to listen to Jesus. But the Pharisees and the experts in Moses' Teachings complained, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them." Jesus spoke to them using this illustration:

"A man had two sons. The younger son said to his father, 'Father, give me my share of the property.' So the father divided his property between his two sons. "After a few days, the younger son gathered his possessions and left for a country far away from home. There he wasted everything he had on a wild lifestyle. He had nothing left when a severe famine spread throughout that country. He had nothing to live on. So he got a job from someone in that country and was sent to feed pigs in the fields. No one in the country would give him any food, and he was so hungry that he would have eaten what the pigs were eating.

"Finally, he came to his senses. He said, 'How many of my father's hired men have more food than they can eat while I'm starving to death here? I will go at once to my father, and I'll say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and you. I don't deserve to be called your son anymore. Make me one of your hired men.'"

"So he went at once to his father. While he was still at a distance his father saw him and felt sorry for him. He ran to his son, put his arms around him, and kissed him. Then his son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and you. I don't deserve to be called your son anymore.'

"The father said to his servants, 'Hurry! Bring out the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fattened calf, kill it, and let us celebrate with a feast. My son was dead and has come back to life. He was lost but has been found.' Then they began to celebrate.

"His older son was in the field. As he was coming back to the house, he heard music and dancing. He called to one of the servants and asked what was happening. "The servant told him, 'Your brother has come home. So your father has killed the fattened calf to celebrate your brother's safe return.'

"Then the older son became angry and wouldn't go into the house. His father came out and begged him to come in, but he answered his father, 'All these years I have worked like a slave for you. I've never disobeyed one of your commands. Yet you've never given me so much as a little goat for a celebration with my friends. This son of yours spent your money on prostitutes and when he came home you killed the fattened calf for him.'

"His father said to him, 'My child, you are always with me. Everything I have is yours, but we have something to celebrate, something to be happy about. This brother of yours was dead but has come back to life. He was lost but has been found.'"

NOTE: Copyright information.

Bible Translation: GOD'S WORD®, © 1995 God's Word to the Nations. Some readings have been adapted to better reflect the original Greek or Hebrew.

Credit for Images:

Pronunciation for difficult words are contained in { }

© 2018 James Groleau.

Permission is granted to use these sermons for any non-profit purpose. I only ask that credit, as to their origination, be noted appropriately.

Grace, peace, and mercy be yours in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

We have all no doubt imagined what God's throne room might be like. We've read some of those verses in the Bible that describe various things we will see when we set foot in that regal and great hall. We've also read much about Jesus' ministry and life. We've even read some about how the Holy Spirit works faith in our hearts.



We've read a great deal about the Holy Trinity. We've learned much about how God has introduced Himself to us, and how He wants us to worship Him. In all of that time, in all of your life, have you ever pictured God running? Have you ever pictured God in a panic? Have you ever pictured God in fear? Probably not.

Running is not something that we imagine being done by The Ancient of Days. If God were so inclined to get somewhere, we can imagine Him rising slowly, deliberately, from His throne. His steps would be purposeful, perhaps even graceful. His robes would flow smoothly. Running is not something we would ever expect God to do. So my question to you is, "Has God ever run in your life?"

Let's take a step back and go to the Gospel lesson for today. We listened as Jesus told a parable. Probably the most misnamed parable of all that Jesus told. It is often called 'The Prodigal Son,' but it should be called, 'The Loving Father.' It is a tale of a father that had two sons. One was a good son. He respected his father, though he didn't always agree with him, yet still lived under his father's rules in his father's house.

The other was a disrespectful son who wanted nothing to do with his father. He wished his father was dead so that he could get his inheritance. Eventually his contempt for his father became so great he told his father he wished he was dead. The father, loving his son more than the son could know, decided it was time for some tough love. The father would give his son everything he wanted. The father would allow him to fall, to fail, praying everyday that at some point he would come to his senses and return home.



The son did exactly what his wise father knew he would do. He ran off and wasted all he was given of his Father's great wealth. He enjoyed every pleasure



money could buy. Then came trouble. There was a famine in the land. There was no work, no money, and no food.

The only job he could find was feeding and working with pigs. His hunger grew so great he was willing to start thinking about eating what the pigs were devouring. Which you can imagine in really tough times would be less than the choicest portions.



Coming to his senses and finding himself in a horrible and shameful place the son decides to return home. He has resolved to live in his father's house as a slave. A situation he thought would have to be far better than where he was.

So he begins his journey home. He expected to hear his father chastise him. He expected to hear his father disown him. He expected to hear his father condemn him, maybe even reject him. He was sure to hear those words, "I told you so." The shame was great, but the pain of continuing in his current situation taxed him even more, so he walked on.



Then that moment came, he walked up yet another of so many hills, and there before him in the distance is his old home. The embarrassment and shame now fill his chest with pain, fear, emptiness and regret. It would not surprise me if he stopped and maybe even reconsidered what he was doing one last time. The humiliation would have crushed what little was left of anything you might call a man in him. He knew he was a failure. Soon so would everyone else.



Looking back, remembering the pain behind him, then reconsidering the pain ahead of him, he takes another step. Filled with grief he continues the slow stride of a man who has come to know he is worthless, not only in his own mind, but everyone else's too. Walking and staring at the ground he does not see what is happening up near the house.

At the house the father is doing what that father did everyday for such a long time. When the work was done he would sit on his porch with a glass of water and stare down that dusty road. Hoping against all hope that he might see his son walking home. His own heart pained by thoughts that he had failed to teach that

boy the difference between right and wrong. Wondering everyday where he went wrong. Wishing he had just one more chance to try again.

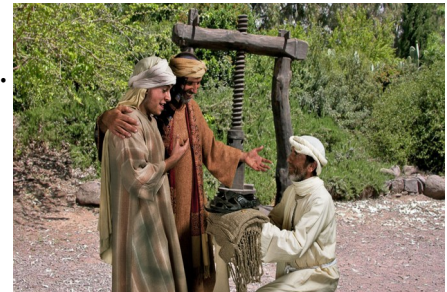
The father, still with a glimmer of hope, glanced up and out at the road. A man was walking there. He was not the first man to be seen walking that road. People walked roads everyday. ...but there was something familiar about this man. Then the father's eyes grew wide and his heart lept as he recognized his son. His son! His son had returned home!



The father does not wait for his son to walk to him. He gets up off his chair, probably spills his water and drops his glass, and he runs. His face looks like panic. His heart is filled with a strange concoction of fear and excitement. He must get to his son. He wraps his son in his powerful working man's arms and crushes him in his embrace.



The son, unable to believe he could be loved by his father, still tries to say his memorized little speech. "I'm not worthy to be called your son. Let me live in your house as a slave. Please don't reject me. Please don't disown me."



Ignoring the words, probably not even hearing them, the father calls for the working hands. He commands a great banquet be prepared immediately. Not the fat goat. Not for this celebration. This celebration was all out full bore, no holds bared. They prepared the fatted calf.

They feasted like it was a wealthy wedding. There was more food and drink than those in attendance could consume in a week. There was dancing, joking, and celebrating. Eventually, even the other brother joined them.



Jesus told this story to explain what Heaven is like; to explain what our heavenly Father is like. You see we ran away from home too. We had it all. We had the comfort of God's love, protection, and care. There was only one rule. Don't eat from that one tree. We've certainly messed up far, far, more since that time, haven't we?



We've rejected God, forgotten about God, been embarrassed to even admit we know God. We've squandered the great wealth of Heaven that He was willing to share with us, for all eternity. We like that boy – now a man – have found ourselves eating pig's waller and slop, when we could be eating at the Lord's Table in the great banquet hall of Heaven.

All of us here have also come to our senses. We've all walked that purposeful slow stride of a person crushed by the reality of what we've done. We've all felt unworthy to be called a child of God. In fact not one of us here can be called a child of God. We've all done far more evil than good if God's Law is the rule by which we are measured.

We're not worthy, but that is precisely the wonder of it. This Lenten season is a time when we remember that we have fallen short, but it is not a time of sorrow and depression. It is a time of anticipation as we wait for the celebration. Because, not too long from now, we will look into that tomb along with Peter and John, and we will see that it is empty.

It is empty because Jesus is God, and God has spoken. He spoke with the authority as God King Emperor of the created universe and the Author of Life. He spoke as the One who sits on the throne of Heaven in glory, power and might. His Words are true because He speaks them and He has declared for all creation to hear, "It is finished!"

Those three little words may not have sounded like much in the hears of those people standing around the cross, but you can bet the echoed like thunder in Heaven and Hell.

In those three little words, you were made clean. In those three little words He gave you power to be called a child of God.¹ In those three little words He brought celebration to Heaven and Earth. An event



¹ 1 John 3:1

that is celebrated ever year at this time because we were lost, but now we are found. We were dead, but now we are alive again.

That is the wonder of it. Christ died for us while we were still sinners, while we were still unworthy. He didn't die because we deserved it. He died because God would not endure being separated forever from that which He loves most – you!

That is the wonder of it. It is the wonder of Easter. That is what we are waiting for, that moment when we hear those words, “The tomb is empty. Christ has arisen!” Then there in the loving powerful arms of our heavenly Father we can say with all the Church in Heaven and on earth.

“Christ is arisen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!”

Amen.

