

Read

Joshua 5:9a, 10-12

Psalm 34:2-3, 4-5, 6-7

2 Corinthians 5:17-21

Luke 15:1-3, 11-32



REFLECTION

In today's Gospel we hear the famous parable of the prodigal son. Have you ever wondered what the word *prodigal* means? It is defined as reckless and extravagant spending and lavish actions. The younger of the two sons in this parable demands his inheritance and recklessly spends it all until he is broke and brokenhearted. He realizes his mistake and comes groveling back to his father, willing to be a servant instead of a son.

Shockingly, his father also acts in a prodigal way. He welcomes his wayward son back with open arms, gives him clothes, jewelry, and throws him a party. The father's actions are so extravagantly full of love that it even offends his older son!

Yet this is how God the Father loves us, in a prodigal, excessive, reckless, and extravagant way. God rejoices when we repent. By his love he shows us how to love. He loves us so much that he gave us his only son to die on the cross for our sins. The Father's love cannot be outmatched, but we can certainly try to imitate it.

QUESTIONS

- ❖ What do today's readings teach you about the Christian life?
- ❖ How have you been loved by God this week?
- ❖ In what ways have you been like the prodigal son, turning away from the Father's love?

Fourth Sunday of Lent

March 30, 2025

ACTION

Think about the ways in which you have been loved by God and then make a list of these blessings. Consider how God has blessed you in the different areas of your life: school, family, friends, activities, work, and so on. Post this list somewhere you can see it every day, such as on your mirror. Remember that God's love is unmatched and unrivaled. He loves us so greatly and so freely. Live in that love this week.



"Reckless Love"—Cory Asbury <https://youtu.be/ZLFak6N04GY>



FOCUS: God always wants us to return to him.



March 30, 2025

FOURTH SUNDAY OF LENT

LECTIONARY #33C

Joshua 5:9a, 10-12

Psalm 34:2-3, 4-5, 6-7

2 Corinthians 5:17-21

Luke 15:1-3, 11-32

Prepare for the Word

The following elements may be used by the catechist, teacher, or youth minister to prepare to facilitate today's session with teens. You may integrate this information into the reflection and discussion on today's readings.

Leader's Context

The parable today is unique to the Gospel of Luke. Even though the teens are probably familiar with this story, there are so many meanings to explore in it that it is worth going through it slowly. We begin with a criticism from the pharisees and scribes about Jesus welcoming and eating with sinners. Today's parable is the third in a set of parables that Jesus gives in response to the criticism from the religious leaders. The other two are the Parable of the Lost Sheep and the Parable of the Lost Coin. Each of these parables speak to the depth of God's mercy and love for us.

Q FOCUS: *God always wants us to return to him.*

Liturgical Calendar Connection

The Fourth Sunday of Lent is known as Laetare Sunday. Laetare is a Latin word meaning "rejoice." This Sunday gets its name from the traditional Latin entrance for the mass, "Laetare Jerusalem," ("Rejoice Jerusalem") taken from Isaiah 66:10. On Laetare Sunday, we experience a moment of joyful hope in the midst of the somber tones of Lent, a reminder that we are an Easter people and renewing our commitment to persevere in our Lenten practices until the end of the season. The priest wears rose-colored vestments, and there may be some other rose-colored décor.

Church Teaching Connection

"Once mercy has been truly experienced, it is impossible to turn back. It grows constantly and it changes our lives. It is an authentic new creation: it brings about a new heart, capable of loving to the full, and it purifies our eyes to perceive hidden needs. . . . Mercy *renews and redeems* because it is a meeting of two hearts: the heart of God who comes to meet the human heart. The latter is warmed and healed by the former" (Pope Francis, *Misericordia et misera*, 16).

Hear the Word

Use this resource, a Lectionary, or a Bible to proclaim the reading. The book should be held reverently or placed on a lectern. If possible, light a candle that is placed near where the Gospel will be proclaimed. Gesture for teens to stand.

Gospel Acclamation

Use the same musical setting that is used in your parish or at school Masses. Teens may help with music and proclaim the Gospel.

Praise to you Lord Jesus Christ, king of endless glory.

Gospel

Luke 15:1-3, 11-32

Reader: A reading from the holy Gospel according to Luke.

All: Glory to you, O Lord.

All make the sign of the cross on their forehead, lips, and heart.

Tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to listen to Jesus, but the Pharisees and scribes began to complain, saying, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them." So to them Jesus addressed this parable: "A man had two sons, and the younger son said to his father, 'Father give me the share of your estate that should come to me.' So the father divided the property between them. After a few days, the younger son collected all his belongings and set off to a distant country where he squandered his inheritance on a life of dissipation. When he had freely spent everything, a severe famine struck that

country, and he found himself in dire need. So he hired himself out to one of the local citizens who sent him to his farm to tend the swine. And he longed to eat his fill of the pods on which the swine fed, but nobody gave him any. Coming to his senses he thought, 'How many of my father's hired workers have more than enough food to eat, but here am I, dying from hunger. I shall get up and go to my father and I shall say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I no longer deserve to be called your son; treat me as you would treat one of your hired workers." So he got up and went back to his father. While he was still a long way off, his father caught sight of him, and was filled with compassion. He ran to his son, embraced him and kissed him. His son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you; I no longer deserve to be called your son.' But his father ordered his servants, 'Quickly bring the finest robe and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Take the fattened calf and slaughter it. Then let us celebrate with a feast, because this son of mine was dead, and has come to life again; he was lost, and has been found.' Then the celebration began. Now the older son had been out in the field and, on his way back, as he neared the house, he heard the sound of music and dancing. He called one of the servants and asked what this might mean. The servant said to him, 'Your brother has returned and your father has slaughtered the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.' He became angry, and when he refused to enter the house, his father came out and pleaded with him. He said to his father in reply, 'Look, all these years I served you and not once did I disobey your orders; yet you never gave me even a young goat to feast on with my friends. But when your son returns who swallowed up your property with prostitutes, for him you slaughter the fattened calf.' He said to him, 'My son, you are here with me always; everything I have is yours. But now we must celebrate and rejoice, because your brother was dead and has come to life again; he was lost and has been found.'"

Reader: The Gospel of the Lord.

All: Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

Everyone may be seated.

Reflect on the Word

When beginning the reflection and discussion about today's readings, first refer to the handout for today. Ask teens what they learned about themselves and about Christian discipleship from performing the action for the week and journaling. Ask teens about the readings of the day: What struck them? What do they think the readings mean? How do the readings affect their own lives? Then begin the following reflection:

In Jesus' time, certain restrictions were placed upon sinners regarding how they were able to interact with the community and in the place of worship. The pharisees were upset with Jesus because instead of remaining apart from sinners, Jesus welcomed them and had fellowship with them, inviting them to his table just as they were. Jesus' interactions with sinners show us that he believes no action can separate us from him. He meets us where we are and invites us to return to God. However, we must actively accept his invitation—it is always there but it is up to us to respond to it and return to him.

► **What are some ways that Jesus invites you to be close to him?**

Jesus' parable in today's Gospel gives us an example of a sinner returning to his father, just as we can return to God. In the story, the younger son asks for his inheritance and leaves his father's house. To do such a thing in that time was to essentially say that the father was dead to him. The son rejected the father fully and completely. While he was away, he hit rock bottom—he was desperate enough to want to eat what a pig would eat! In Jewish law, pigs were unclean, and it was forbidden to eat them. But the son was in such a bad place that he was willing to eat what they ate.

► **What are some thoughts people your age might have if they felt they had made too many mistakes for God to accept them, that they were too far away from God for God to ever want them back?**

The forgiving father in the parable represents God when we return to him after being away. Even when we have done our worst, when we are distant and separated from him, God welcomes us with open arms when we return to him. He is both generous and extravagant with his mercy. He is overjoyed with our return!

► **What are your thoughts on the reaction of the son who stayed?**

► **What does the father's reaction to him tell us about God's love and mercy toward us?**

The oldest son struggled with his father's mercy. He is, perhaps, justifiably angry and jealous. He wanted things to be "fair." He had remained faithful and stayed by his father's side. Jesus shows us that God loves each of us who remain with him. His love for us is in no way diminished by his rejoicing over the return of one of his flock. God loves all people equally and invites all of us to be with him.

Wrapping It Up

Consider these points to conclude the discussion and reflection. Integrate the thoughts and ideas that surfaced during the discussion as well as the "Church Teaching Connection" on page 166.

Jesus meets us where we are.

God always welcomes us back when we have fallen away.

God's love is generous and merciful.

Act on the Word

Lost and Found

For this activity, you will need Bibles, paper, and pens.

We frequently lose things. Keys, homework, library books, and so on. When we find them, we are ecstatic, especially if we have been searching for a long time or if the items were particularly important to us. For this activity, divide the teens into small groups. Have them share stories of losing something important to them. What did they lose? Where did they find it again? How long did it take? How did they respond when they found it again?

Once the discussion is finished, pass out the Bibles, paper, and pens. Have each group create their own parable that speaks to God's rejoicing when we

are lost and then are found. Use the reading from today and the parables of the lost coin and the lost sheep from Luke's Gospel as a reference (see Luke 15:1–32). Invite them to focus on the joy that is felt when the lost item or person is found and incorporate that into their own parable.

Once they have written their parable, give them space to practice performing it. They can use materials around the room as props or costumes to enhance their parable, sharing with other groups as needed.

When they are ready, have each group present their parable. After each parable, discuss the story as a large group. What was lost and how was it found? How do they portray God's joy, like the father in the parable today? What did they learn about God's mercy and love that they can apply to their own lives?

Closing Prayer

Merciful God,

*you are quick to forgive us when we fail
and your compassion is endless.*

*May we reach out to others in forgiveness
and compassion as well,*

*and may we be received with open arms
when we repent of our wrongdoing.*

Through Christ our Lord.

Amen.

For Next Sunday

To help teens prepare for next Sunday's Mass, print, email, or share on a blog or social media the handout found on the next page. The JPG and PDF files are available at www.ltp.org/lwgr. Encourage teens to attend Mass with family or friends. If your parish will be celebrating the third scrutiny with those preparing for baptism at the Easter Vigil, the Year A readings may be used. The handout and session for the Year A readings are found in the appendix of this book on pages 255–258.