Fourth Sunday in Lent – Luke chapter 15, verses 1 – 3 and 11b - 32 :-

Usually this passage is known as 'The Parable of the Prodigal Son'.The idea of a loving father running to meet his returning son is a wonderful picture of the love our Heavenly Father has for His repentant children. However reading again Luke chapter 15, verses 1 – 2, gives a very different reason for the telling of this parable! A better title for this parable would be 'The Parable of the Two Sons'!

Luke chapter 15, verses 1 – 3:-
Here we have a picture of a mixed crowd of '*tax collectors and sinners'* along with *'Pharisees and the scribes'* listening to the teaching of the Lord Jesus. The *'tax collectors and sinners'* were those who 'sat lightly' or ignored the religious law. It does not mean that they broke the law of the land! The *'Pharisees and scribes'* were strict keepers of the 'law of Moses'.

Verses 11 – 24:- A parable told for the *'tax – collectors and sinners'*!
This section is the part of this long parable usually emphasised in preaching. In teaching about the love of the Lord God for mankind it is perhaps without parallel in scripture. It is an illustration for well known texts like John chapter 3, verse 16 - *"God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.*

In verse 12 note that an heir was able to claim his share of an estate during his father's lifetime if he wished to do so. The eldest son could claim two thirds, the other children would divide the rest. This is brought up again in verse 51 where the father reiterates that all the estate now belongs to the eldest son.

Many of the wealthier young men of Jesus' time went abroad to Rome or to Antioch for the 'high life' of the city! The situation would be a familiar one to his hearers. After he had squandered his inheritance, and in the midst of a famine, *'no one gave him anything'*. (verse 16). Realising that his only hope was to be taken on as cheap labour by his father he turns for home. It is the fact that he repented and realised how foolish he had been that led to his turning and forgiveness.

Verses 25 – 32:- A warning for the Pharisees and Scribes!
Read these verses alongside the 'Woes to the Pharisees' in Matthew chapter 23. Remember that many of the Pharisees were upright law-abiding citizens, keeping strictly to the Torah, the food laws and the commandments. Here the elder son, the one who had spent his life in obedience to his father, feels resentment at the 'favouritism' (as he sees it) shown to his repentant brother! The inheritance was his anyway! His brother had already had his share and wasted it. In this welcome of the repentant sinner the long term eldest son lost nothing. He had the love and respect of his father. The estate was his. There was in reality no reason for bitterness and jealousy.
"There will be rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents rather than over ninety-nine righteous people who need no repentance." Luke chapter 15, verse 7.

Maybe some questions:-
How does your fellowship act (or react):-
- to 'in-comers'?
- to 'favouritism' shown to new members?
- to 'outreach' to those outside?
- to those seeking help and advice?

The list could go on!!

"The Son of Man came to seek and to save that which was lost". (Luke chapter 19, verse 10)

See also Ezekiel chapter 34, verses 15 – 16. N.B. The whole of Ezekiel chapter 35 is worth reading.

Terry Brighton 27 / 3 / 2025