**Good Shepherd Lutheran Church**

**Watertown, WI**

 **“This Son of Yours”**

Pastor Aaron Reseburg

March 30, 2025

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

In the name of Jesus, Amen.

“You can pick and choose your friends, but you can’t choose your family.” There are few things in this world as complicated as family, which of course you don’t need me to tell you. In life, most of our relationships are transactional, you do this for me and I will do this for you. If you stop doing this then our relationship is over. Even friendship is transactional, no matter how old or well-seasoned, is transactional. There is always an out.

Family is different though, there is no real out. You can shred the papers, you can change your name, you pretend all you want, but there is no changing blood. Family is family. Husband and wife are no different, they don’t share the same blood but the Bible makes it clear that they are one flesh. This makes things complicated. We have all had times where we may have wished that one member of our family was not a member anymore. Sometimes the hardest neighbor to love is your own family member.

Not only are your own family members some times the hardest to love, but the wounds that they inflict hurt the most. I have only been a pastor for three years and yet I have already seen this over and over again. You know I think that the reason family can be the source of so much pain is because we have all seen families that don’t struggle, we have all seen families where everyone for the most part gets along. We have all met someone who we wish was our grandfather or grandmother, or father, or our mother, or our brother, or sister, or son or daughter.

When we see something good and we measure it against our not so good, it makes the hurts and the pains even worse.

In our reading for today, the parable of the prodigal son, we see the very best and the very worst of family.

We have two sons. The younger who wished that his father was dead, who took his inheritance and wasted it on reckless living in a far-off country. The older who never really loved his younger brother and whose love for the father is questionable as well.

Sure the older brother never messed up, he was never brought home by the police in the middle of the night, they never found him passed out in a street, his father never got called to go pick him up. The older brother might have lived his life as an obedient son, but when it comes down to it, we see the real resentment that was building up for years.

The Son resented both his brother and eventually his father. The younger brother had brought shame on their whole family and his father had let him do it. The Father did not need to give the son everything he asked for and yet he did.

So, in the Father we see the very best that family can offer. We see a Father who loves his children unconditionally even it seems to a fault. The Father goes to extravagant lengths in order to show his love to his son. He gives him his inheritance early, he shames himself by running to the son thereby saving his son from being shamed, then he brings the son back into the family without any conditions.

By taking his inheritance early, the son tried his best to leave the family, he threw away his relationship to the father for what he thought was freedom. His so-called freedom led him into despair and poverty, he gave up his own loving family and try to buy a new family, when the money ran our however, he was forced to become a slave to a foreigner.

Our families are all complicated, but we have been brought into the best family that there is, the church. We have been united together by something stronger than blood, we have been united with the same spirit. In our baptisms, we have become children of the Heavenly father. The father in the story is now our Father. He is ready to give us everything that he has, to give us the kingdom itself. If you are wondering which son we are, at times we have all been both brothers.

We have all wasted the love that the father has shown to us. Our sins cost Jesus his life and yet we still flippantly sin pretending that it cost him nothing. We have all been the older brother as well. We have all scoffed at the father’s love for a sinner. We have all thought about how much better we are than someone else in our father’s family because our life is more together.

The heart of the Older Brother’s problem is that he puts his faith in his own obedience to the father instead of the father’s love and he wants recognition for that work. He doesn’t really understand the father at all. We can be the same way, we do good things for people or for the church and we want recognition, we want other people to notice and thank us for our good works until that becomes the reason we do anything at all.

Yet the Father doesn’t abandon us, he doesn’t throw us out of the family for our pride and our arrogance. He invites us back into the party, he invites us to come into the family and enjoy all the benefits that come with it. All we have to do is leave our pride in the field and love our brothers and sisters. We don’t love them because of what they can or cannot contribute or do. We love them because the Father loves them.

Our Father loves us too, even when we are prideful and arrogant. He loves us and he continues to offer us forgiveness for all our sins. He continues to seek and save the lost, he continues to make his family bigger, to find more sons and daughters. There is still time for prodigal children to return and when they do, let us run with our father to greet them and bring them into the house where we are all fed with our perfect brother’s very own Body and Blood. A feast greater than all feasts.

 In the name of Jesus, Amen