

**Read Luke 15:11-end focusing on verses 28-30**

This is a well known story Jesus told to help us to understand the God's love. A lot of the time we think about the celebration of the younger son's return and the great celebration of the father knowing that his son is still alive and probably consider the big brother a bit of a spoil sport. Just jealous. Thinking the younger one must be a favourite due to the fattened calf and the lavish party being thrown in celebration of his return. It is proof of the father's love that he may be disappointed in his younger son's actions but is more than happy to celebrate his return because he has learnt a lot and because, however far a child strays, who wants them to suffer?

But who can't relate to the older son? He's always wanted to please his dad, he tries to never do anything wrong, be obedient and respectful and then he comes in, exhausted from a hard day's work and wanting nothing more than to relax for the night, possibly have a meal, clean up and go to bed. But what does he hear as he approaches the house? A roaring party! I'm sure that's not overly unusual in some ways. His dad probably throws parties for his friends from time to time if they come around and want to celebrate...after all, he isn't a pauper...but his little brother has returned. How is that worth a celebration? How can you celebrate a life of evil and wasted resources? Celebrate the return of a person who has shown that they care more about money and living the high life than their own flesh and blood? Should this evil and wasted life be celebrated? Especially with the best food available? The bigger brother certainly doesn't think so, and to be honest, I would feel very peeved that I'd done all the work to keep the family going and yet my disobedient sibling gets treated like royalty on his return.

Yet, much as we can sympathise with the older brother's irritation, he should be happy that he will own everything when their father dies, that his brother is still alive and, even though it took really extreme measures, he finally understood what he had done. The little brother may be celebrated today but he has a long way to go as he now has nothing in terms of material possessions. Where the big brother is set for life so long as he doesn't fall off the straight and narrow, the young one has none of this. Unless his brother feels charitable and gives a portion of his inheritance, the younger brother will have to work for every penny he gets. His return may be a glorious occasion, but even in the First Century you needed money to survive and little brother now has none. He is going to have to work harder than his brother to get the same standard of living.

So, much as it is beautiful that the father doesn't reject his wayward son and welcomes him back with open arms because he has learnt the error of his ways and the father loves him no matter what, this doesn't mean that the son will get the same level of respect as his big brother. It doesn't mean that life will magically return to how it was before he ran away to live wildly and recklessly, it means that everyone is happy he is safe and that he has realised his true worth, but life isn't easy and he has to start right at the bottom of the ladder again.

How can this encourage and teach us today? Firstly, life isn't handed to us on a plate. The bible never teaches us that we will have an easy life. What the difficulties are for each of us will be different. Secondly, however far we fall, however terrible we feel our lives may be we cannot be far enough away that God won't be willing to take us back if we turn around and run back to him. Finally, just because we see someone who appears to be doing well doesn't mean they are. Just because a person is having a lavish party doesn't mean they paid for it and they may be back to a life of difficulty and hardship the next day.

**Prayer Points:**

- *Those who are struggling with the effects of having spent all their money and are being judged for not understanding how to budget or use money effectively*
- *The people who can't pay for the basics however much they budget and have to choose between food and heating or prescriptions, or even the roof over their heads*
- *Then people who are struggling to find a job due to employers requiring references they don't have or experience they can't get for an entry level job, or medical conditions and disabilities that mean they can no longer apply for the jobs they have experience in and now can't find the money to retrain and get experience in the jobs they can do*
- *For the people who see those being celebrated that outwardly don't deserve it and feel resentment as it feels like the person being celebrated is being congratulated for making a mess of their lives rather than the courage and strength it took to turn their lives around in the first place*
- *For everyone feeling the pinch during the cost of living crisis - especially those that outwardly appear to be OK, but inwardly are barely holding it together*