

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

**What kind of welcome?**

Responding to criticism that he is spending too much time with tax collectors and sinners, Jesus tells the well-known story of the lost son. A younger son asks for his inheritance, which he then squanders on wild living, leaving him destitute. He decides to return home to ask for his father's forgiveness and is surprised to be greeted not with a reprimand but with a warm welcome and a celebratory party. The loyal older son, however, is resentful of the fuss made over the returning prodigal – and less than welcoming to his returned sibling.



**Bible notes**



Luke uses a common technique here of telling the same story three times, in slightly different ways, in order to drive home the intended message. Jesus is addressing the Pharisees and scribes who are grumbling because they have noticed that among the crowd travelling with Jesus and listening to him are 'tax collectors and sinners' – that is, those who are working for the occupying Roman forces, and those who are publicly judged to be living in a way that is out of step with God. The Pharisees and scribes are leaders among the Jewish people and work hard to protect the faith from those who might water it down or introduce heresy. Recognising that sometimes we need protecting from ourselves, they are keen to keep God's people pure. Hearing their grumbling, Jesus tells them in three different ways the importance of seeking out what is lost and celebrating when it is found. The stories are not identical – the sheep, coin and son have different levels of agency in their becoming lost, and in their being found – but the result is always the same: a celebration that mirrors the joy in heaven when someone turns back to God. This parable, the third in the set, introduces another dimension: the question of how different characters respond to the same event. While the father has longed for the son's return – not seeking him out against his will but watching out for him to choose to return – and celebrates this, the brother who never left is first (inadvertently perhaps) excluded from the celebration, and then peeved, jealous and angry. He takes for granted the intimate relationship he has sustained with his father and his home securities, and does not wish to risk the change entailed in welcoming the returning brother.

**First impressions**

- What's the warmest welcome you've ever received?
- How welcoming is your church/group to prodigals/outside? Are we sometimes more like the older brother than the father?
- What can you do today to show God's welcome to someone?



**WATCH**



Watch 'Prodigal', Milestone Church – a modern retelling of Luke 15. <https://bit.ly/4focUSE>

**CREATE**

Look at the entrance to your home. Is it welcoming? Who will pass through this door? Who could you welcome? Can you create a welcoming space and invite someone in? Perhaps share a drink or a meal together.

**WALK**

Go for a walk and look out for direction signs which point the way. Pause at each one and consider times when you have wandered away from God. What helped point you back? How does God welcome us in those situations?



**LISTEN**



Listen to 'How Deep the Fathers Love for us' <https://bit.ly/3AUhidA>

**Pray**

Loving God, as you welcome us, so may we welcome others: with compassion, generosity and friendship. In Jesus' name. Amen.

