

## Conversations along the way...

In preparation for our Benefice Day of Prayer and Pilgrimage on 10 October we invite individuals and groups to explore this popular and well-known parable that Jesus told, encountering it afresh in these troubled times. As before, the idea is not to *learn about* the parable, but to *enter it*, listening for its meaning to us in our lives and in this world, and to be surprised by God.

### The Parable of the Prodigal Son

#### A prayer to begin

Lord God help us to come closer to you. Open our hearts to your guiding presence, open our ears to your living Word, and open our mouths to bless one another. Amen.

#### Read the passage aloud.

##### Luke 15. 11-31

There was a man who had two sons. The younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of the property that will belong to me.' So he divided his property between them. A few days later the younger son gathered all he had and travelled to a distant country, and there he squandered his property in dissolute living.

When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs. He would gladly have filled himself with the pods that the pigs were eating; and no one gave him anything. But when he came to himself, he said, 'How many of my father's hired hands have bread enough and to spare, but here I am dying of hunger!

I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands."' So he set off and went to his father.

But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him. Then the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' But the father said to his slaves, 'Quickly, bring out a robe—the best one—and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!' And they began to celebrate.

Now his elder son was in the field; and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. He called one of the slaves and asked what was going on. He replied, 'Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has got him back safe and sound.' Then he became angry and refused to go in. His father came out and began to plead with him. But he answered his father, 'Listen! For all these years I have been working like a slave for you, and I have never disobeyed your command; yet you have never given me even a young goat so that I might celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours came back, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fatted calf for him!' Then the father said to him, 'Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found.'"

**Read the passage a second time, pausing after each paragraph, and note anything that catches your attention.**

**You might like to reflect on these questions:**

- In our own lives, and in society generally, reflect on what is 'dissolute'. What are we squandering?
- Hunger sends the son home. What are we hungry for in the world right now?
- What do you think the returning son was expecting?
- Think about the father. It is suggested that the parable should be called the prodigal father. What do you think?
- The parable leaves us with an unanswered question: does the elder son join in the celebration of his brother's return or does he stay outside fuming in his self-righteousness? The door is unbarred but what is stopping him enter?

**You might like to meditate on this painting by German priest and artist Sieger Koder.**



What do you notice? Where is your eye drawn? What are your feelings?

**For further reflection...**

As a preparation for our Benefice Day of Pilgrimage and Prayer, read the Book of Jonah (ideally out loud to yourself, and all the way through in one sitting). Notice any parallels with the parable of the prodigal Son.

*The Book of Jonah is found in the Hebrew Scriptures (the Old Testament) near the end. The full text is available on our website, followed by an article about the genre of Jonah to help us approach this rich and powerful story with imagination and openness.*

**A prayer to finish**

Father of all,  
we give you thanks and praise that,  
when we were still far off,  
you met us in your Son  
and brought us home.  
Amen.

*Rembrandt's famous painting of this scene is widely available online. If you are unfamiliar with the painting, you might like to use it to continue your reflection.*

<https://www.tripimprover.com/blog/the-return-of-the-prodigal-son-by-rembrandt>

*The classic book by Henri Nouwen is also well worth reading if you haven't discovered it already.*

<https://www.amazon.co.uk/Return-Prodigal-Son-Story-Homecoming/dp/023252078X>