

Maundy Thursday April 1

Restored

Luke 15:11-32

11 Jesus continued: “There was a man who had two sons.

12 The younger one said to his father, ‘Father, give me my share of the estate.’ So he divided his property between them.

13 “Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living.

14 After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need.

15 So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs.

16 He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything.

17 “When he came to his senses, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired men have food to spare, and here I am starving to death!

18 I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you.

19 I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired men.’

20 So he got up and went to his father. “But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.

21 “The son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’

22 “But the father said to his servants, ‘Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet.

23 Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let’s have a feast and celebrate.

24 For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’ So they began to celebrate.

25 “Meanwhile, the older son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing.

26 So he called one of the servants and asked him what was going on.

27 ‘Your brother has come,’ he replied, ‘and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.’

28 “The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him.

29 But he answered his father, ‘Look! All these years I’ve been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends.

30 But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!’

31 “ ‘My son,’ the father said, ‘you are always with me, and everything I have is yours.

32 But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’ ”

Even when knowledge of what’s in the bible grows dim, the story of the Prodigal Son continues to shine. What a heart-warming story! It’s a tale of tragedy and suffering, until the sorrowful son wends his weary way home, falls into the arms of a loving father, and lives happily ever after – just the way life ought to be! Thank you, Jesus, for telling us a story like this to make us glad.

Except that Jesus’ first audiences wouldn’t have heard it that way. To their ears, this story was nothing short of *scandalous*. He told it to shock them, not to make them feel all warm and fuzzy inside. The sort of culture that existed in the Mediterranean world in those days was what sociologists call an

'honour/shame culture', similar to what exists in parts of Asia and in some minority ethnic communities in modern Europe. Honour is supremely important; a family has to be able to hold its head up high in the community; if a son or daughter goes off the rails, it shames the whole family; they lose a place of respect in their community. It is a tragedy that is difficult to bear.

That's what the Prodigal Son did to his family, and especially to his father. But – hey! - it all ended well, didn't it? Well, yes, but not in the way you might think. In going back to his father with his tail between his legs, with a nice little speech saying 'I'm sorry' he was actually risking his life. To shame his father like that was one of the worst crimes a son could inflict on his father; how could he know how a really angry father might react?

Well, we *know* how his father reacted. Yes, he welcomed him back with arms of love. But what would that look like in the eyes of the wider community? An act of love? No – more likely an act of *weakness*! Take that on board and you see afresh the depth of God's love for his errant and rebellious children, for that is what we are. At the cross, in the words of Henry Francis Lyte's hymn, we are 'ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven'. Today, we've been thinking about the third of these categories – RESTORED. And if we hear the story of the Prodigal Son the way Jesus meant us to hear it, we get an amazing glimpse of the wonder of how it can be that we can be RESTORED.