

Sermon 31 March 2019 – Lent 4 (& Mothering Sunday) – Luke 15:11-32 (Prodigal Son) -09:30 All Age

We've just had a brilliant acting out of the Gospel story today – the prodigal son (**keep kids at front**)

- Thinking about today being Mother's Day, looking back at the story, do you think someone important is missing? **The sons' mother!** Would anyone like to come up and be the mother?
- What are mothers good at? **caring, cooking, cleaning, listening, helping, washing clothes, reading stories,**
- And remember the bit in the story when the younger son takes his share of the money and races off into the distance to have fun.?
- I wonder what his mother was thinking? (**sad, upset, worried, surprised, disappointed...**)
- and I think his father would have been the just same – because when the son came back home eventually after he'd spent all his money, his father was so pleased to see him – so pleased he gave a big party to celebrate – he didn't start telling him off, he was happy he was safe and still alive
- Actually it doesn't matter that Luke didn't write about the mother, because the father is really there to show both parents showing the love they have given to their child and still have for him even though he messed up.
- Today being Mother's Day, lots of children are thinking about their mums
- But some children don't have a mum bringing them up – who else might do this?
- **dad, stepmother, foster parent, carer, grandparent, aunt, cousin, much older brother or sister**
- So actually on Mother's Day I think we really need to remember and say thank you to ANYONE who is acting as a mother to a child and is bringing them up with love. And you know, this parenting doesn't stop when the child becomes an adult:
- One of the hardest things to do is to let go of your child and let them go off and probably make a few excruciating mistakes – like the younger son in the story.
- You then just need the courage to believe you've brought them up the best you can and be there to support them when they need you, as they almost certainly will! You can pray as well!
- Some people like to think of God as a mother as well as a father because of his nurturing role towards us that is traditionally a female characteristic.
- Jesus liked telling parables – stories with a deeper meaning, where the people in the story represent God and us
- So who do you think the father in this story could represent? **God**
- What sort of person was the father in this story? **loving, generous, forgiving, trusting, hopeful,**
And our Christian God is like that too: God is love.
- Love welcomed the son back because real love is forgiving, joyful and sharing
- but often our human nature gets in the way of real love – hopefully only in small ways: like getting cross because you don't get your own way,; scoffing a whole packet of mini eggs instead of sharing them round
- and the 2 sons are us – which one are you I wonder?
- Think about the 2 sons only in the first part of the story before the younger son comes home.
- **To all congregation** :*Hands up* if you think you're more like the older son – responsible, hard-working, doing what his parents want him to, reliable, no trouble, not questioning anything
- *Hands up* if you think you're a bit more like the younger one – a bit headstrong, keen to be independent, wants to see the world, have adventures, live life to the full

OK – the people who are more like the older son, put your hands up again.

Keep your hands up if you would do the same thing as the older son when your father gives a big party and makes a big fuss over your brother because he's come back from being "lost"

How do you feel? **annoyed, it's not fair, jealous, frustrated, overlooked, not appreciated**

I think if we are really honest, then we all feel like that for an instant – it's part of being human – but how many of us would sulk and refuse to come in to the party even when your parent pleads with you to be nice? **ask for show of hands....**

So that's the difference between God's love and our love (usually- sometimes we DO manage real love – reaching out to another person, putting them first, enjoying their success or sharing in their happiness). God is saying *please, please come to the party and join in with the joy I feel that your brother is alive.*

- Maybe we can't quite believe that God is THAT nice can we?
- That He always loves us and will forgive us, if we want to try again.
- Jesus made that possible for us, by dying on the cross he took on our sins – all the things we feel bad about doing, that we know have hurt other people or put ourselves first and used power over people– and Jesus opened up the way once and for all for us to be in a good relationship with God, to be totally forgiven and start again
- So, through believing and trusting in Jesus Christ, we come closer to God's love and become part of His family
- and that is very comforting especially for some people here today who find Mother's Day difficult because they don't fit into the "happy" categories celebrated today

Perhaps your mother isn't around any more or has dementia so she isn't like she used to be

Maybe you're a mother whose child is very ill or has died

Maybe you wish you could be a mother but you're not

Maybe you're one of the other "mother" people, like a grandparent or stepmother and you're slightly annoyed that there isn't for example a grandparent day (there is in Japan!)

- But as Christians we have a parent figure who loves us (God) and if we open ourselves to Him through prayer, he will lead us to find support among fellow caring people & to understand ourselves and our situations better. God can help us see in a new way which will bring us peace and better relationships and more fulfilment in life.
- God created us in his own image – he gave us all the ability to love....but he also gave us free will- we can chose how we act – as parents and as children.
- Love is about setting people free to be their own person. It doesn't mean you stop loving someone but sometimes it's scary to step back and give the person you love that freedom to choose and sometimes it's so emotional that you're not sure what to do. That's ok because God understands- he loves *us* so much, he has allowed us to make our own choices, but as Christians we believe He is always there to guide and comfort us when things don't go as we had expected.

And love enables you to forgive –The father forgave his son for wasting his share of the money and welcomed him home, but I wonder if the son stayed humble and continued to work hard after a few weeks of comfortable living again and regaining his strength?

- Does he show a real change in attitude after he has said sorry?
- God the Father would continually be hoping he has, but God would still keep loving him anyway in the hope that he would grow closer to Him eventually!

Imagine you are the younger son....., how would your story continue?