

## 6. Background Notes for Luke 15:11-32

The Pharisees bitterly criticised Jesus because he met and chatted with tax collectors and sinners : people whom the Pharisees regarded as cut off from God and despised by God. Jesus has been deliberately making time and space for these 'sinners.' And in this story he goes to great lengths to set out what God is really like: not judgemental but unbelievably trusting in people's goodness.

The younger son goes off recklessly and ends up in a tough learning situation. He returns with a new appreciation of what he had abandoned. He wants to be back again with his father, in whatever way is possible.

The elder son is fixed; he doesn't let down his father and he won't lose out on any of the estate due to him but he can't open himself to this new unexpected 'side' of his father. Doesn't know or expect it or want it.

The father throws dignity aside and ignores the patriarchal norms of Jewish families; he goes over the top in celebrating. His unbounded joy is because the son has come back, to be close to him again.

This is God's attitude to us: not separation but closeness; not loving us because we 'deserve it' or waiting until we 'deserve' it. In God's way of loving 'deserving love' doesn't come into it. The two short parables leading into this one depict the shepherd and the woman searching madly to find what is lost.

The stand-off of the elder son misses the point. Cuts himself from the celebration. Jesus' challenge is to not to remain a stranger but to

enter the community of joy, forgiveness, acceptance, believing in everyone's potential that flourishes wherever God is present.

## 7. Concluding prayer

Trusted guide,  
You are our mentor, our inspiration  
our home of good choices and decisions.  
You help us to search with confidence  
as we find our way to quiet peace.

Teach us how to hear your voice  
to be aware of what is in our hearts and minds  
to listen to your wisdom in those around us  
to acknowledge our intuitions  
and ponder our dreams..  
to listen to the earth and all of life,  
for in each piece of existence,  
you are guiding us.

*Joyce Rupp*



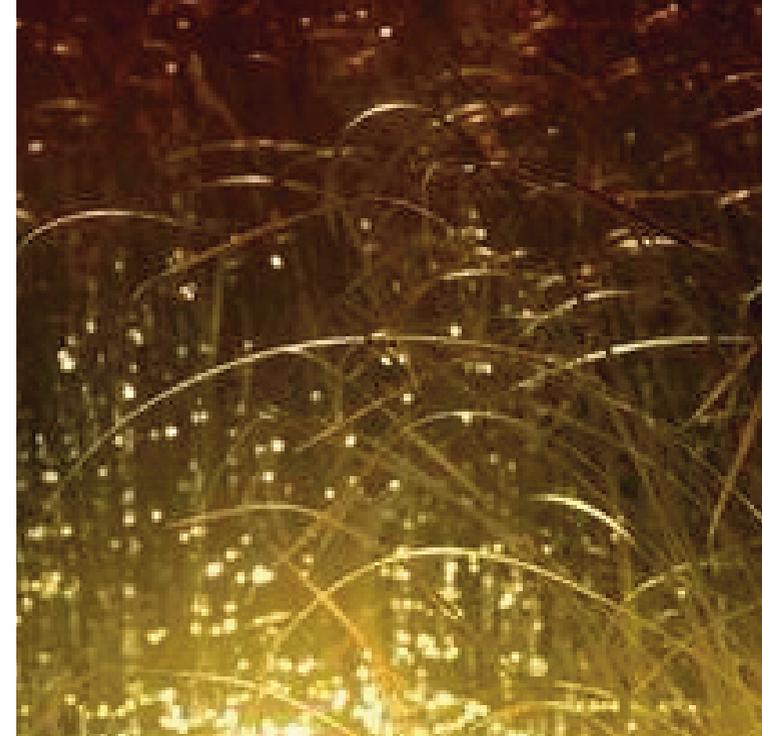
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**Catching Slivers of Light**  
Fourth Sunday of Lent 2019



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## 1. Welcome and opening prayer

May the grace of God  
shine upon our faces.

May the justice of God challenge us.

May the mercy of God encourage us.

May the courage of God support us in dark  
times.

May the power of God keep us humble.

May the humility of God inspire us.

May the generosity of God surprise us.

May the radiance of God dazzle us.

May the faithfulness of God give us hope –  
today and always.

*The Book of Blessings, p. 137*

## 2. Gospel Text Luke: 15:11-32

Jesus continued: “There was a man who had two sons. The younger one said to his father, ‘Father, give me my share of the estate’. So he divided his property between them.

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. After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his field to feed pigs. He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything.

When he came to his senses, he said: “How many of father’s hired servants have food to spare, and here am I starving to death! I will set out and go back to my father and say to him:

‘Father I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired servants.’ 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. The son said to him: ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’ 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. Bring that fattened calf and kill it. Let’s have a feast and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’ So they began to celebrate.

Meanwhile, the older son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. So he called one of the servants and asked him what was going on. ‘Your brother has come,’ he replied, ‘and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.

The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him. But he answered his father: ‘Look! All these years I’ve been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. But you never even gave me a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!’

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

## 3. Quiet Moment

*People can read over the story again and pick out a word or short phrase that strikes them and say it out loud. When everyone has had a chance to speak, people can silently listen to what God is saying to them in their hearts linking it with themselves, their community, society/world. Then some sharing.*

*NB Not a time for argument.*

## 4. Reflection questions for Luke 15:11-32

1. Which of the father’s qualities do you most need:
  - His willingness to let his son make mistakes
  - His patience in waiting for change
  - His capacity to forgive
  - His wisdom in dealing with his children
  - His ability to celebrate life
  - other
2. Have you had to move out of your comfort zone to accept a different truth? What did it feel like?

## 5. Prayers

*Mentioning the people/situations we want to pray for....*