

Something Different

This week we have another Godly Play.

The Lost Son.

Take it slowly and give yourself time to savour it!

Come, Holy Spirit, fill my home with peace.

Come, Holy Spirit, fill my heart with love.

Come, Holy Spirit, fill my life with your power.

Amen.

A Godly play approach to the Parable of the Lost Son.

Luke chapter 15. Verses 11 to 31.

Begin by reading the story, and use different versions of the Bible if they are available to you. Perhaps even find a well loved children's' bible and look at the illustrations too. This well known parable is often referred to as the "Prodigal "son. However the meaning of prodigal is lavish or extravagant and could equally be applied to the father in the story.

Telling parables was well established in the Jewish faith and those listening to Jesus would have recognised that there were hidden depths to the tale and perhaps even subtle digs at those in authority. Stories of families resonate with us all, and we often recognize the characters and occasionally ourselves. When showing Godly Play to children or adults, a frequent question is "who are you in this story?" Now read the passage again with this thought in mind before moving on to the prayers and responses.

Look at picture 1: A father had two sons.



In Jewish law, the older son would have inherited two thirds of the estate, whilst the younger, one third. The younger son is impatient with his life. He wants his inheritance now and has no interest in the land or responsibilities to those who work there. It's simple, he wants money and he will not wait until inheritance day. It is as good as saying to his father " I wish you were already dead".

Consider: The father does not remonstrate, he does not admonish and he does not plead or react with fury. The father knows that his son must learn through experience however painful. Parenting requires letting go at some point. If the younger son gets his inheritance once the father has died, then he will not be there to pick up the pieces. Perhaps this way is better.

Pray: Father forgive me when I have been headstrong in my family, either as a parent or child. Forgive the times when I have over or under parented, choosing to ignore rather than deal with an issue. Bless my relationships with my children/parents. Give me wisdom to know when to keep quiet and when to speak out, using loving words and compassion as I do.

Look at picture 2: The son receives his wealth from the father.



Consider: The younger son heads off to a faraway place, perhaps where his bad behaviour cannot be witnessed by anyone who knows him and would have taken issue. He leaves the safety of his family and faith to try “new things”. He has a wonderful time splashing his new found wealth around and attracting friends. He is probably the centre of all the parties and gatherings. It all seems to be splendid.

Pray: Father forgive me when I want to be in the centre and the most exciting person. Forgive me when I forget to include those who are quieter or cannot afford to join in. Help me to share my wealth, my time and my attention. Prompt me to share my friendships and gladly include others into my groups and make them welcome. Remind me Lord that exciting people and times are not always good for me and showing off rarely leads to depth of character.

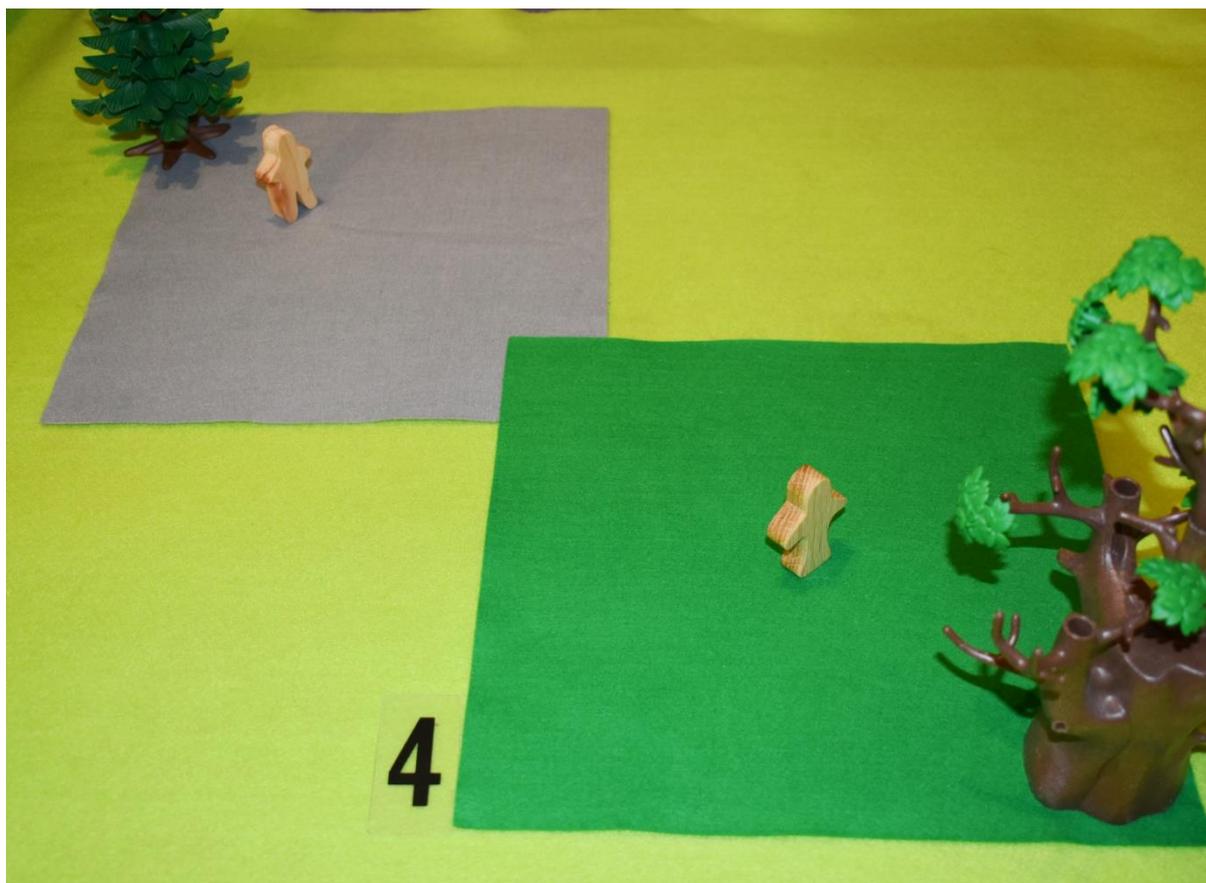
Look at picture 3: The money has been squandered and famine comes.



Consider: the son thinks he has all that he needs and wants. We inhabit a society that focuses almost exclusively on satisfying wants or encouraging dissatisfaction. The money runs out because it has not been carefully managed or wisely spent. Now the son faces starvation in a foreign land in the grip of a severe famine. [Take a pause here to pray for central Africa that has seen a plague of locusts, poor harvests and Covid 19]. The son hits “rock bottom” as he finds the most demeaning work for a Jew. As pigs were considered unclean there must surely not have been a worse situation, yet out of desperation the son tends the pigs. The Jews refer to eating pods [carob pods] as a way of saying it does not get worse than this.

Pray: Father help me to recognise my need for you at all times. Lead me out of despair as I face more weeks of lockdown and separation from my family. Comfort me in my troubles and worries and help me to seek your face and guidance however dreadful the future seems. Help me to pray for family members who have left a life of faith. Lord keep me loving and hoping as I await their return.

Look at picture 4: The lost and lonely son returns.

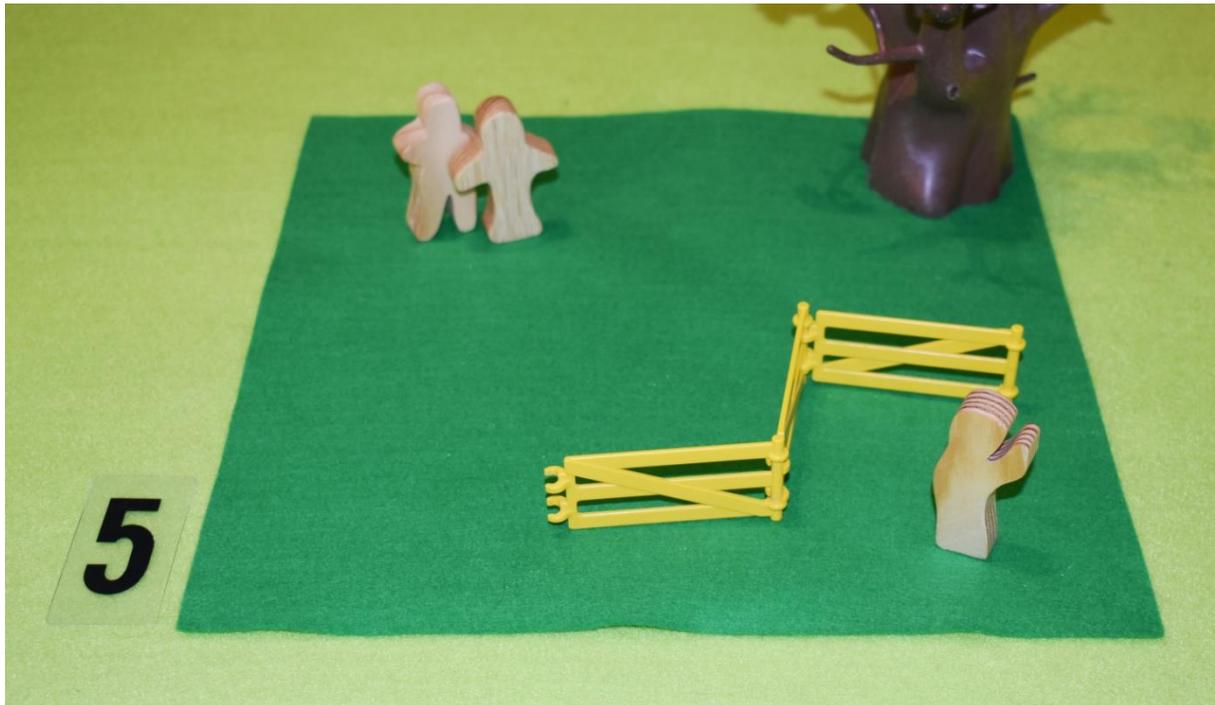


Consider: The son has plenty of time to think about his mistakes and to feel shame about his behaviour. Perhaps he feels sorry for himself at first. The son reflects but then he does much more. He repents. He realises that the worst place in his father's household is better than where he now finds himself. He vows to return and accept the consequences and relinquish his right as a son.

Some bravery is needed by the son to risk facing rejection and humiliation in his Father's house. He is determined to apologise and perhaps work back his debt to his father.

Pray: Lord, sometimes I find it hard to admit I am wrong. I am slow to put things right when it is easier to pretend all is fine. Help me to be honest with myself and about myself and to heal and repair broken relationships when I know it is in my power to do so. Help me to be wise and forgiving and gentle with my words.

Look at picture 5: The father runs.



Culturally we miss the significance of what happens next. Maybe we know the story so well that we rush past this detail. No adult Jewish man would ever risk displaying their legs [unless fighting and tucking in their cloak or clambering into a boat]. You simply did not hitch up your cloak and certainly would not be seen running! The father is prepared to risk gossip or accusing words as he runs to his son. The son he must have been watching for on a daily basis. What a picture of our heavenly father we have. Waiting patiently and then running toward us.

Pray: Lord in my heart help me to be ready, ready with prayer and action, ready with loving words of affirmation and comforting reassurance to those I love and worry about. Remind me to be watching out and expectantly waiting so I am not caught off guard. Help me to remember that the father wept on his son's neck, hugging, kissing and joyful before even a word of repentance had escaped from the son's lips. May my responses be so filled with Christian love.

Look at picture 6: The father rejoiced, the older son fumed.



Consider: The older son is perhaps furious that his brother has returned. Who has not thought at times, "it serves them right, they deserved it, they should have known better, well that what becomes of....." "The older son is so jealous that he cannot even be glad that his father no longer grieves. He is so concerned with the issue of fairness that he misses joy and gladness of heart. Yes, he is obedient but it is about duty and resentment not love. He will not come in from the fields when his brother returns yet he is aware of the homecoming. He complains that his father never even gave a goat for him to celebrate with friends, even after all his hard work. The younger son is given a ring and cloak restoring him to the position of son but the older has everything now and should be content

Pray: Lord help me not to compare all the time and fuss about good things happening to others. Remind me that my story with you is enough. Help me to have a heart full of rejoicing when I hear good news and not to feel envy or regret. Please help me when family relationships are strained or full of misunderstandings that are causing pain and separation. Give me strength to be the person who makes the first move toward reconciliation. Remind me that my life of faith is a privilege and anyone finding this is a matter of rejoicing.

Look at picture 7: Lost and found. Everyone celebrates.



Consider: We all are happy when things get resolved whether in our own families or those of our friends. The father wants to share with everyone that his son has returned. If you have ever had your heart in your mouth over one of your children, you will know that at this point just to have your child in your arms, living and breathing is enough. Apologies and explanations can wait. Celebration is in order and you will gather in many outside the immediate family to share in the amazing news. What sadness then that the older brother would rather sulk and fume. In so doing he has missed an important opportunity to bless and be blessed and to restore a broken relationship. He has always had and still has his father's blessing.

Pray: Lord please nudge me when I am in danger of missing opportunities of blessing. Tap my shoulder and point out when I am refusing to back down or be gracious. Niggle at me when I prefer to be self righteous or pompous rather than loving, gracious and gentle as you are.

Suggested responses to the story.

Think about who you are in the story. Are you happy or sad? Are you fulfilled or bored? What is it you really want? Are you tired of your family responsibilities? Do your siblings irritate you? Do you feel unfairness within your family? Now talk to Jesus about your muddles.

Rewrite the story with a modern setting.

If you are in a lockdown family situation, act out the story. [If you are pleased with the results then film your masterpiece to show others].

If you have younger children then use Lego or Playmobil or other toys to set out this parable. Talk through the story as you go .

Get out paints and craft and attempt some art work. Look on Google images to see which part of the story has most been reproduced. It is worth contemplating Rembrandts image of the father with his old and gnarled hands resting gently on his son's shoulders.

Read Henri Nouwen's classic book about the picture.

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

<https://www.goodreads.com/work/quotes/169164-the-return-of-the-prodigal-son-a-story-of-homecoming>

Look up these worship songs on YouTube.

How Deep the Father's love for us by Stuart Townend.

Oh The Deep Deep Love of Jesus [epic version] Simon Khorolsky.

Father God I Wonder [with lyrics].

Give thanks [with a grateful heart].

To God Be The Glory sung by The Vagel Brothers in four part harmony.

Allow the songs to minister to you or sing along. Let your response to your loving Father lead you to prayer and worship.

Sit and think of times when you have been forgiven for past mistakes. Take your thanks to God in prayer.

Write a letter or card of thanks to your earthly father or children. Forget about what is not to your liking and instead focus on the love and affirmation you can show.

Now read the story again in Luke. Think about how you would have set this story out, where you would place the key characters. Would your ending have been different? How? With whom do you most identify? Draw your version as story sections.