

Trinity 9 (2026)

A friend of mine, now deceased, found God in a cornfield.

Born in England, he came to America as a young man and lived with a farming family in Indiana.

This family were churchgoers and very devout, while my friend came from a family that did not attend service regularly and were not very religious.

Well, as he told the story, he began attending church with his host family and there heard the Gospel.

After wrestling with the claims of Christ for a few weeks, he went out among the stalks of corn to think. It was there he crossed the line from unbelief to faith.

It was a wonderful discovery, and my friend went on to become a clergyman in the Church of England and later the principal of a theological college.

A great story, but Jesus gives us one better. In today's Gospel, we have the story of another young man in a far country. This one finds God, not in a cornfield, but in a pigpen!

More remarkable still, this young man was a Jew, and Jews, at least the orthodox ones, don't eat pork or have anything to do with the lowly hog.

But there was a silver lining in all this. Dire circumstances caused him to recognize the folly of his ways and to go home.

It has been said that **"Sin will take you farther than you want to go, keep you longer than you want to stay, and cost you more than you want to pay."** This proverb tells the

story of this young man's life. But again, something good came out of being in a pigpen.

But back to Jesus the storyteller. Jarred Wilson in his book *The Storytelling God* ranks Jesus at the very top of this craft.

He writes: **“Once upon a time a king came to earth to tell stories, and the stories contain the mystery of eternal life.”**

Wilson's thesis is borne out in the Parable of the Prodigal Son.

Here we are given a glimpse into the very heart and mind of God . . . the God, pictured by the father in this story, who runs out to meet his returning son. Some have gone so far as to suggest that this parable should be called the **“Parable of the Running Father”**.

Now, why is this detail so important?

Well, it is because men in the father's position in those days did not run. It was a breach of decorum. It showed a lack of gravitas.

The story is told of Mrs. Franklin Roosevelt, the First Lady of the Land, running down the driveway of the White House to embrace her friend Mary McLeod Bethune, a black educator from Florida. As you can imagine, her behavior, especially in that day, was met with surprise and amazement.

The sight of the running father would have been just as shocking.

It would have been especially shocking to anyone who knew of the outrageous behavior of the younger son before he went away (which, no doubt, included everyone in the village). He had, as you will remember, demanded his inheritance . . . in essence saying, **“Dad, I wish you were dead. Give me what is mine and get out of the way.”**

The son's behavior was outrageous, but even more so was the father's response. The running father speaks of outrageous grace.

It tells us of a God who delights not in the death of a sinner, but in his return . . . just such a God as you and I need.

Perhaps you grew up with a very different picture of God . . . perhaps one with a flyswatter in His hand ready to pounce at the least provocation.

If this is your image of God, get rid of it. It's not biblical.

No, the God of the Bible, the God revealed in and through Jesus, is a God of grace. He is for us, not against us. He seeks our return, not our destruction.

With that said, this does not mean that we should think of Him as an indulgent grandfather

who waves His hand and says “Go ahead” at everything we want to do.

No, as the Bible tells us, God is unalterably opposed to sin. **“Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity,”** says Habakkuk 1:13.

But this aversion is not arbitrary.

It is because this thing Christians call sin – going our way rather than God’s -- hurts, maims, distorts and finally destroys. It carries with it a death sentence. That is why God does not want us to stay in the pigpen.

In today’s parable, we see the father waiting and longing for his son to get out of the mire and come home.

And, if we set today’s parable alongside the two which precede it in Luke 15 – the parable of the Lost Sheep and the Lost Coin – we find

God doing more than passively waiting. We find Him actively seeking.

This seems to be the way God continues to operate today. He does not violate our freewill. He does not hogtie us and bring us out of the pigpen, but He does come looking for us.

This quiet operation is carried out by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit makes us aware of our need, the seriousness of our offence, and takes us by the hand and leads us back to the Father.

Perhaps, as you look back at your life, you can see God's hand at work . . . revealing, calling, correcting and wooing. If you can, say, "Thank you."

Jesus, the great storyteller, has given us the Parable of the Prodigal Son not just to entertain -- as we might read one of O. Henry's stories -- but to instruct and to bring us to life eternal.

Before I close, allow me to highlight three takeaways from today's passage.

Takeaway No. 1: **the blessing of trouble.**

At first glance, blessing and trouble do not sound as if they belong together. They are polar opposites. They are as different as chalk and cheese.

But, as we have already seen, God is able to turn trouble around and use it for our good. This is what happened to the younger son. A pigpen led to blessing.

The psalmist speaks of this principle when he writes: **“It is good for me that I have been in trouble; that I might learn thy statutes”** (119:71).

And then again in the same psalm: **“Before I was troubled, I went wrong; but now have I kept thy word.”**

The same transformation – trouble into blessing – can happen to you. Trouble does not have to defeat you.

“God can turn your scars into stars,” to quote a popular 20th century American television preacher. Put this principle to the test in your life.

We’ve looked at “the blessing of trouble; now to Takeaway No. 2: **the peril of delay.**

Once our young man realized he was in the wrong place, he did not sit there and wallow in his misery, nor did he go and seek to negotiate a better deal with his employer, nor did he make peace with his plight.

Rather, he got up and got out of that ungodly place. There is a lesson here for us all. If you find yourself on the wrong path, don’t blame others and certainly don’t stay there. Do an about-turn and begin the homeward journey.

There is danger in waiting for a more convenient time. That time may never come. Hence, God's word to the person who hears the call of the Gospel is: TODAY. **"Today, if you will hear his voice, harden not your heart."** None of us is guaranteed tomorrow, only today. Delay is dangerous.

Finally, we come to Takeaway No. 3: **The elder brother in all of us.**

It is easy for us to become critical of others and to dismiss them, as did the older brother in regard to his younger sibling . . . to see them as beyond the reach of God's mercy and concern . . . especially if they are guilty of things we would never think of doing or have actively restrained from doing.

We can always find people worse than ourselves. This was the way of the Pharisees and scribes – the religious leaders of Jesus' day. They looked down on people.

Indeed, it was they who prompted Jesus to tell this parable.

Luke 15:2, sets the stage: **“And the Pharisees and scribes murmured, saying, This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them.”**

“This man” refers to Jesus who was calling all and sundry to His kingdom party. Yes, tax collectors . . . those Jews who had colluded with the hated Roman government, many of whom were dishonest, as well as common people who did not have the wherewithal to keep the minutia of the Law as the scribes and Pharisees kept it. The elder brother almost certainly represents these self-righteous religious leaders.

What about you? What about me? Have we written anyone off? Who are we more alike: the running father or the begrudging elder brother?

Three takeaways: the blessing of trouble, the peril of delay in responding to God's call and the elder brother in all of us.

This parable from the greatest storyteller of all time is for our instruction. What will you do with it? What will I?