

The runaway son (Luke 15)

Sometimes Jesus told the people around him special stories to teach the crowd of people gathered around him. These stories are called parables. These stories with a meaning gave the people listening to Jesus something to really think about, long after the time they were first heard.....and us, too, as we listen now.

This is one of those parables.

Once upon a time there was a father who had two sons. The older son was hard-working and wanted to please his father. He did everything that his father asked him to do, even digging up the potatoes. The younger son had his own plans. The father was a patient man, a generous man. He was also very rich.

One day, the older son was out in the fields, working hard. The younger son went to his father and said, "I am bored working on your farm. I want to go and explore the world. I want my share of your money. I don't want to wait till you die. I want it now, while I am young enough to enjoy it". So, sadly, the father gave the younger son his share of the money.

The younger son packed his bag and left on his journey to a faraway country. He visited strange lands. He saw some very strange people! He tasted strange foods. He spent lots of money.

While his older brother was at home working hard on the farm, the younger son made many friends, drinking friends and dancing friends. He had a wild time. He spent lots of money. After a while, there was no money left. Then there were no friends left; they all walked away and left him alone. Then there was a famine and there was no food left either. First, the younger son became hungry. Then he became very hungry. He became so hungry that he thought that he had probably better get a job. He asked everyone he met for a job but the only job that he could get was looking after some pigs. He was so hungry he would have been glad to eat the pigs' food. But no-one gave him anything. He was very miserable and all alone.

Finally he came to his senses and said, "My father's workers have plenty to eat and here I am, starving to death! How stupid can I get? I am going home! But what will I say to Dad?" He thought about what he would say to his Dad when he got home – perhaps he'd say something like this,

"Dad, I've been wrong and I'm sorry. I've disappointed you and God. I don't deserve to be called your son. But I need to eat. Could I come home and just be one of your farm workers?"

The younger son picked up his bags and started on the long journey home to his father. What had the father been doing all this time?

As he sat on his front porch, not a day had gone by without him looking down the road for his son. The father loved his son despite being so badly treated by him. This day, he did the same thing. He sat and waited, looked down the road and hoped. So, when the son was still a long way off, his father saw him coming, leapt to his feet and ran to meet him!

The son started his little speech, "Dad, it's like this. I've been wrong. I've disappointed you and God. I don't deserve to be called your son...." But his dad brought his son a new robe to wear, a ring for his finger and new sandals for his feet. Best of all, he threw a party to celebrate his son coming home!

What about the Older Son? Remember him? What was he like? Was he happy about the party?

He was very unhappy. He stayed outside. He didn't go to the house and join the party, so his father went outside to find him. "It's not fair, Dad", he said to his father. "I've always worked really hard for you and done the right thing. My brother was stupid and did the wrong thing and you're throwing him a party! You never even gave me a cake to share with my mates." *Was it fair?*

It was very hard for the older brother to understand how much his father loved and forgave his younger brother. He was jealous and confused. But his father didn't love one son more than the other. The father told his older son, "You are always here with me and everything I have is yours."

This story teaches us about our Father God. If we realise we have run away from him, he wants to forgive us and welcome us back to live with him just like the father welcomed his son back in the story.