**Slide 1**

**Journey From The Far Country**

**Luke 15:1-3. 11-32**

Text: Jesus eating with inners, tax collectors – upsets the religious leaders – looks like he condones the folks and their actions that are against the Law.

Tells 3 stories

-The Lost Sheep

-The Lost Coin

Slide 2

-Today’s text: Parable of Prodigal Son or I prefer – Parable of the Lost Son

Only found in Luke’s Gospel – But it’s really a classic that has been re-written time and time again.

Story about young son taking his inheritance and striking out on his life’s journey.

What he did was logical – due to inheritance laws. – oldest son of family got twice as much as any other son, including taking over family business. Therefore, this younger son was going to have to go out on his on eventually. So, he took his third and left.

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And you know this story – This young son spends his small fortune in a far away country on one party after another, accumulating many ‘fair-weather’ friends. ‘Fair-weather’ because when the money runs out, they disappear. Younger son left by himself, no money and to top it off – a famine occurs –

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He’s desperate for food – only job for this Jewish man is slopping the pigs.

[Heinous job for a Jew to work with unclean animals! Forever unclean. Picture of being as far from God as possible!]

[Riotous living bad – but pig slopping – the worst]

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Literally mired up in the muck of bad choices – estranged from himself, from family and from God!

THEN: - He comes to Himself!

What does that mean – He comes to himself?

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Leslie – bright girl but, unlike her 2 sisters, was excruciatingly shy and introverted. Consequently, she didn’t have many friends.

Recalls that her favorite book was one from a chemistry set she’d gotten at Christmas. The chemistry experiments wowed her. She decided to someday be a scientist and make a real discovery someday.

Went off to college – exciting at first – made the dean’s list first semester.

Then slowly things changed – her concentration ebbed, got increasingly distracted, had strange thoughts, people began to shun her – She was weird.

Her roommate finally announced she was moving out She felt entirely alone. Slipped into depression – classes held no interest, began to sleep all the time missed classes – Felt she couldn’t live like this any longer.

Leslie – decided to end her life with sleeping pills. But she woke up dizzy – got to the infirmary – saved her. But she had to leave school.

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Diagnosed with severe depression and borderline personality disorder – mood swings.

After hospital stay, couldn’t seem to make it at home, moved out and began a further downward spiral. – Suffering from depression and the mood swings, nobody wanted to be around her very long. In and out of hospitals, finally living on the streets.

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One day found herself in Raleigh, NC – seeking shelter from the freezing cold - wound up in a night shelter.

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She couldn’t stand it any longer – found a pack of matches on a desk, took them – set her clothing on fire – trying not to scream until it’s be too late. Finally, help came. A third of Leslie’s body severely burned.

Started a process of being in and out of more hospitals including time at Doretha Dix

Eventually, check herself out and was back on the streets – now her 6 ft frame was a mere 80 lbs. covered with bandages and very weak.

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One cold night – she was told of the Urban Ministries – place to get bus tokens so she wouldn’t have to walk so much.

There at her lowest point, she met Sister Helen Wright. Sister Helen took a personal interest in Leslie –

* At first helping her with bus tickets,
* then salve and fresh bandages,
* Then food,
* then temporary place to stay, Trips back and forth to the hospital.

Leslie said, “I can’t believe she’s going to all this effort for me!” As much as Leslie wanted to fight it and run again, Sister Helen’s compassion was overpowering.

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Then, Sister Helen asked Leslie to answer phones for the center!

* Something helpful about focusing on the problems of others rather than her own.
* Started going to church again – contact to be an in-home tutor for a girl – science.
* Found an apartment, hooked up with HEC – Handicapped Encounter Christ

Through this group – asked by Dr. Jim Drake to volunteer in a lab. That became a job.

In 1993, enrolled in night classes. Published a science article

Scholarship to Duke – 1997 graduated with biochemistry degree.

Now at East Carolina in medical school

Wants to serve the poor on the streets

Wants to make a difference

Wants to let others know that there is hope – wants to be a “Sister Helen” to other like herself.

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Younger son – found himself after being in the far country – realized that he had done wrong and needed to go home for a new start.

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Leslie – through Sister Helen’s love and compassion, found herself in the far country and began the journey home.

Slide 15

Watched the movie – The Kid – with Bruce Willis

39 yr. old man – talented image consultant

* + - Big money, cars, house
    - Lots of power

Yet he is chick-less, dog-less, at odds with father, and a jerk.

People only around him because they work for him or need his talent.

Takes a visit from his 8 years old self to realize he’s in the far country of life.

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He “comes to himself” and begins his journey to life based on love and forgiveness.

Message to Pharisees, to Leslie, to us –

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Jesus came to lead us from the far country back home to God.

Conclusion:

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Many more of us than we like to think live in the far country

1. We have nice homes, cars, lots of things – yet we feel far from God
2. We have good careers that demand a lot yet feel far from God
3. We have great families yet feel far from God
4. We have lives filled to the brim with activity – yet when we lay down at night we wonder if it is all worth it – feel far form God.
5. Some of us are in the far country of illicit relationships – far from God and family.

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All of us journey to the far country in one way or another

* People “come to themselves”
* Through circumstances and guilt
* Through other’s influences
* Even through special encounters with God
* When this happens, God says come Nome!
* You will be accepted and forgiven
* You have a place in God’s Kingdom
* Slide 20

When you come home in repentance then get ready for the party!

Because great joy goes up in heaven when one sinner repents and comes home from the far country.

Slide 21

Jesus came to lead us back to the path.... to God! During this caronavirus pandemic do you see more clearly how you have strayed to the far country?

If so, it is time to come home!

Amen