

Sermon 2
Breaking Free
Luke 15:11-32

*** Words of Invitation**

Praise Team

Come, let us worship together.

Let us open our minds to the challenge of reason,

open our hearts to the healing of love,

open our lives to the calling of conscience,

open our souls to the comfort of joy.

Astonished by the miracle of life,

grateful for the gift of fellowship,

confident in the power of living faith,

we are here gathered:

Come, let us worship together.

Please stand.

Children's Message

Choral Offering "Amazing Grace (My Chains are Gone)" Chris Tomlin

Prayers and Meditation

Pastor

Music for Meditation will play after the prayer. No singing. No Words on Screen! Can be any or multiple instruments.

Almighty God, we come to you today in confidence, for this world in which we live is your world, brought into being through your love for all your people. And as we bring all our concerns before you, we know that you are waiting to hear us and to respond to us.

Lord, we pray that you will teach us all how to provide for our own lives, mindful of our own needs, yet also of the call of Christ to put our trust in him. Help us to spend our time and our money in a manner worthy of your kingdom of love.

Lord, make this church a place of generosity where people work together, giving all that they are and all that they have, so that the wonderful resources of our world may be better shared.

We pray today for people who wander through life, constantly seeking a purpose, a reason for living. We remember especially those who store up wealth for themselves believing that the road to happiness is through the accumulation of possessions. Help them to find in you, love, acceptance, and wholeness.

We pray today for those who are grieving, struggling to have basic needs, and those who have lost hope. We pray that as we let go of our possessions, we will grab hold of love for others. That we will be active in helping others have basic needs for living. That we will be beacons of your hope for life now.

We gather here today, seeking you Lord, to fill us, strengthen us, and push us out of our comfort and into your way for our lives. Help us to live simply with great love.

We make our prayers as part of our common life of worship and service to Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen

~ Taken from a prayer written by Rev Anne Paton, and posted on the Church of Scotland's **Starters for Sunday** website.http://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0014/15620/4_august_2013.pdf

We Hear God's Word

Scripture Lesson

Luke 15: 11-32 (CEB)

Pastor intro: Last week we met a rich young man who was experiencing so much financial gravity that he could not bear to break free and accept Jesus' invitation to be a disciple. He could not or would not submit one area of his life to Christ: his wealth. Today we consider another rich young man who appears in the Gospels. He is a character in a parable Jesus told about a loving father. He is the younger of two sons who feels financial gravity with such force that he goes to his father and asks for his

inheritance early. You can imagine how the family would react to the younger son's wish. The anger would be as high as the hurt would be deep.

Parables often place people in peculiar scenarios to make their point clear. This young man wanted to pursue fully the kingdom of self. He must have felt that he was floating as he set his course and began to experience the pull of a distant land. Having spent his life in a fairly confined space, he was excited to begin a great adventure. What he didn't know was that he was about to be sucked into a black hole.

Let's listen...

11 Jesus said, "A certain man had two sons. 12 The younger son said to his father, 'Father, give me my share of the inheritance.' Then the father divided his estate between them. 13 Soon afterward, the younger son gathered everything together and took a trip to a land far away. There, he wasted his wealth through extravagant living.

14 "When he had used up his resources, a severe food shortage arose in that country and he began to be in need. 15 He hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed pigs. 16 He longed to eat his fill from what the pigs ate, but no one gave him anything. 17 When he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired hands have more than enough food, but I'm starving to death! 18 I will get up and go to my father, and say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. 19 I no longer deserve to be called your son. Take me on as one of your hired hands." ' 20 So he got up and went to his father.

“While he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was moved with compassion. His father ran to him, hugged him, and kissed him. 21 Then his son said, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I no longer deserve to be called your son.’ 22 But the father said to his servants, ‘Quickly, bring out the best robe and put it on him! Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet! 23 Fetch the fattened calf and slaughter it. We must celebrate with feasting 24 because this son of mine was dead and has come back to life! He was lost and is found!’ And they began to celebrate.

25 “Now his older son was in the field. Coming in from the field, he approached the house and heard music and dancing. 26 He called one of the servants and asked what was going on. 27 The servant replied, ‘Your brother has arrived, and your father has slaughtered the fattened calf because he received his son back safe and sound.’ 28 Then the older son was furious and didn’t want to enter in, but his father came out and begged him. 29 He answered his father, ‘Look, I’ve served you all these years, and I never disobeyed your instruction. Yet you’ve never given me as much as a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. 30 But when this son of yours returned, after gobbling up your estate on prostitutes, you slaughtered the fattened calf for him.’ 31 Then his father said, ‘Son, you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. 32 But we had to celebrate and be glad because this brother of yours was dead and is alive. He was lost and is found.’”

Pastor: The Word of Life for God’s people.

People: Thanks be to God!

SLIDE ONE

Don't let the name fool you: a black hole is anything but empty space. Rather, it is a great amount of matter packed into a very small area - think of a star ten times more massive than the Sun squeezed into a sphere approximately the diameter of New York City. The result is a gravitational field so strong that nothing, not even light, can escape. That is why they can be felt but not seen. Recent discoveries offer some tantalizing evidence that black holes have a dramatic influence on the neighborhoods around them - emitting powerful gamma ray bursts, devouring nearby stars, and spurring the growth of new stars in some areas while stalling it in others. Black holes are born when a star dies or collides with another star. Scientists estimate that there are as many as ten million to a billion such black holes in the Milky Way alone.

The Kingdom of self is a space also full of black holes.

SLIDE TWO

For many people, money and the things it buys can produce a level of gravity from which they simply cannot escape. One of the worst combinations in this regard is to place a large sum of money in the hands of a person with low spiritual and emotional maturity. This is exactly what happened to the young man in the parable. His spending choices were predictable:

Soon afterward, the younger son gathered everything together and took a trip to a land far

away. There, he wasted his wealth through extravagant living. (Luke 15:13 CEB)

Most of us understand the problem faced by the young man. He was anxious to be independent, but he was immature, and immature people have trouble handling money. His vision was limited to a brief few hours into the future. His impulse control was so weak that all options for how to spend Daddy's money looked equally inviting. He lived fast and large until it was all gone, and then stumbled away in regret when a famine picked the last coin from his pocket. It's a sad story, one that we continue to hear today.

SLIDE THREE

We all at one time or another have probably dreamed of just winning the lottery and being set for life. But ask most lottery winners. Their stories speak more to money being like sand that washes away with the tides.

That's why I don't play the lottery....the stories of lottery winners losing everything are very depressing. For example: Lou Eisenberg won \$5 million in 1981, which at the time was the largest lottery win ever. After taxes, he received payments of \$120,000 annually for 20 years. He bought a condo in Florida, took trips to Europe and Hawaii, and gambled. He also gave cash to whoever he figured needed it. Of his spending, he says, "I lived for the day."

Shortly after cashing his last check in 2001, Eisenberg was broke. Now 81 years old, he lives in a mobile home on social security and pension income that amounts to about \$1,000 a month.

William "Bud" Post won \$16.2 million in 1993, and five years later said, "Everybody dreams of winning money, but nobody realizes the nightmares that come out of the woodwork, or the problems."

Post's brother tried to hire someone to kill him and his wife. A landlady forced him to give her a third of his winnings. He was convicted of assault for firing a shotgun at a bill collector, and for passing bad checks. He declared bankruptcy. When Post died in 2006, he left behind little or nothing for his seventh wife and the nine children he had with his sixth wife.

SLIDE FOUR

The once-rich but then very poor young man in Jesus' parable might have felt like this too. He may have realized what a fool he'd been. He might have been embarrassed but eventually he saw no choice but to return home. He knew he deserved his father's wrath, but he was hungry and desperate, so he decided to ask his dad for a job on the estate. As he walked up the familiar road home, he was amazed when he saw the old man running toward him. It was beneath the dignity of an older man in Israel to run anywhere, much less toward a son who had brought shame to the family. The son must have taken this as a sign of bad things to come: *Wow, if he's running toward me, he must really be angry.* Self-defense may have occurred to him; it is certain that his father's grace did not.

That was the day the son learned about the father's generous spirit. The father restored him to the household and put a signet ring on his finger. He was brought a new robe to wear. It was a kindness he did not deserve, forgiveness he did not merit, and

love that he did not anticipate. His father's generosity gave him a new life.

Think of how that experience must have changed the son's character. We don't know, but we can guess....The selfish boy died in the distant land; a new man was born because of his father's love. We can imagine that, rather than thinking about himself, he now looked to the needs of others. Extravagant living in some distant land would no longer appeal to him. Being with his father, enjoying the company of his father, serving his father and doing what he gave him to do with joy, these things now brought him happiness. He would be kinder and more gracious.

Most important of all, rather than simply being a recipient of his father's generosity, he now possessed the insight to become a participant in it.

There is a moment of epiphany for Christ-followers when we recognize the difference between being a beneficiary of God's kingdom and being a participant in God's kingdom. When you find yourself submitting your kingdom of self to the kingdom of God, good things begin to happen. Your life begins to change and finds an identity rooted in generosity. You become more interested in giving what you can than in getting what you can get.

We become *stewards*. A steward is a person who manages another's property. Christ-followers understand they are stewards of a gift given to them by God—a life with unique strengths, talents, abilities, and resources to use in ways guided by God's own Spirit that lives within them, so as to honor and glorify the giver of the gift.

Sadly, most Christians do not truly act as God's stewards, and there is a reason for it. Financial gravity pulls us toward a deep belief that we are the owners of what we possess and that we can use it to support whatever lifestyle we desire. Being an owner means we can make decisions free of the control and even the consideration of others. We submit to no one when financial gravity holds us back.

In 2010, a book called "The Paradox of Generosity" shared data gathered during a 5 year period in which 2000 Americans were surveyed concerning their happiness and spending habits.

They found that **SLIDE FIVE**

"very large numbers of Americans, despite wanting to enjoy happy, healthy, purposeful lives, fail to practice the kinds of generosity that actually tend to lead to happiness, health, and purpose in life. Something gets in their way" [*Paradox*, page 99].

They also found that: **SLIDE SIX**

44.8 percent of Americans reported that they gave \$0 of their income to any charitable purpose.

You read that right. Zero. Not one dollar. They didn't even put a quarter in one of those plastic funnels where you can see it go round and round and spin real fast before dropping to the bottom. Nearly half of all Americans gave away zip, nada, squat, zilch. Nothing at all. These people turned down Girl Scouts, refused high school band collections, did not slow the offering plate at church, ignored the cancer research drive, told the Salvation Army they had no change at Christmas. The report went on to say this:

SLIDE SEVEN

Another 41.3 percent gave less than 2 percent of their income away. This means that the vast majority of financial generosity in the U.S. is offered by about 15 percent of the population that is willing to give away more than 2 percent of their income.

[*Paradox*, page 103]

You may be thinking: *But at least people gave their time, and time is valuable.* Yes, time is valuable. Volunteerism is extremely important to charitable organizations. In the same study, more than 76 percent of the people self-reported that they gave no volunteer hours to any organization. That is three out of four people, a remarkable number. It seems there is a generosity famine in our country.

SLIDE EIGHT: Lack of generosity is not about resources; it is about identity. It's about who you are as a child of a generous God. A generous child of God invests in the work of God's kingdom. And the leaders of the church have a job too – to be good stewards of the resources given, so that God's work gets done.

As many of you may know, the people of Israel practiced giving 1/10th of their income to support the worship life of Israel and to take care of the most vulnerable people in society.

Why would God ask them to do this? I honestly don't think God has any attachment to money and is clearly not in need of the tithe. So why? I believe that the tithe is intended to be a discipline that enables the people to help expand God's kingdom. As they give their tithe, they recognize that they are God's servants. Through their generosity, they gain a sense of identity.

And it changes their actions. They offer their best for God's kingdom as a way to live into their identity as a steward of God's resources.

This practice of generosity changes us. Let's watch this video clip. **SLIDE NINE**

(Show "Sermon Video 2: Ms. Margaret.")

SLIDE TEN

Ms. Margaret shaped the life of her family through generosity. Whether your generosity fits in a mason jar or a charitable trust, you can do the same. As Christians we are called to be stewards of all that we have, from our possessions and money to our time and abilities. God calls us to be faithfully employed in God's service. Yet, all too often, financial gravity restricts and inhibits true stewardship. What would happen if we stopped holding tight to what we have and began, in joy, to let go? What would happen if we all went from being a recipient of God's goodness and grace to being a participant in God's work in the world?

The problem is not that people lack desire. Most people who don't give simply can't give – they've never learned how. Learning how to align your life for generosity is what we will talk about next week.

In the meantime, we are giving each of you a handout called the Financial Planning Sheet. Use it as a guide to take a look at your family budget. Some of you may already have a budget. But if you don't, give it some thought and some work. And we'll talk more about that next week.

Continue the Clean-Out challenge! How many of you are trying to do the ideas listed on the calendar you got last week? Many of you put them in the trash....we saved them! If you don't have yours, there are extra on the info table in front of the office. Get ready to bring your items to the church on the 28th from 10 am. until 1 p.m.

Let's continue to practice generosity in all we do this week and see what joy we feel! Amen.

We Respond to God's Grace

**Giving to God's Church
Invitation**

Pastor

Christian stewardship begins with God at the center. When stewardship revolves around any other center, it is misconceived. When you give to the church, you are serving God through the church. And although the institution is an inadequate substitute for the incarnate body of Christ, we work together to do God's work in the world for all believers. Thank you for all that you give.

Will the ushers collect our offerings.

An Offering of Music "Jesus, the Very Thought Of Thee" John Dykes (In the setting of J.S. Bach's "Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring" arr. By Cindy Berry)

*** Singing our Thanks and Praise UMH 94 Praise God, From Whom All Blessings
Flow**

*** Praying our Thanks and Praise Pastor**

*** Responding to the Word in Song Praise Team**

*** Sending Forth into the World Pastor**

The dismissal (sending forth) is done toward the end of singing, and before the last bit. It will be done during music playing in the background softly.

No unlighting the candles. People just leave!