Series: I Can Only Imagine

Message: 02 Imagine Forgiveness Luke 15\_11-24

Text: Luke 15:11-24

Theme:

Date: May 6, 2018

Location: Christ Community EFC

**If you would please turn in your Bible to Luke chapter 15.**

(p. 874 in the pew Bible.)

Forgiveness is a topic that we often talk about, but can find it to be a struggle to live out in everyday life.

There are times when it is hard to offer forgiveness to others, especially if they have hurt someone you love.

Others struggle with receiving forgiveness, forgiving themselves, for the mistakes they have made.

Jesus knew that forgiveness was not easy.

He grew up in a family where some of his family members didn’t believe who he was. In fact they thought he was made.

He was treated harshly by people who didn’t really know him.

He was killed by the very people he came to save.

**Jesus knew that forgiveness was not easy, but Jesus also knew the power of forgiveness.**

Today, we are going to take a look at Luke 15, which is known as the parable of the prodigal son.

Parables are earthly stories with heavenly meaning. Jesus often taught in parables to help explain God’s heart and priorities.

This story in particular was about a son who desperately needed the power of forgiveness in his life.

In Luke 15:11 Jesus begins this story: “…**There was a man who had two sons. 12 And the younger of them said to his father, ‘Father, give me the share of property that is coming to me.’ And he divided his property between them**.”

The story opens up with the younger son requesting his inheritance before his father has died. The father agrees and divides the property between the older son and the younger son.

This essentially meant the land the father owned was divided so that the younger son could sell off his property to someone else and take the cash.

In essence by asking his father for the land the son basically saying, “I wish you were dead, in fact dad—you are already dead to me.”

We learn two things about the son from this verse.

1. He is selfish.
2. He wants independence.

We have all been the son, haven’t we? We have all struggled at one time or another with selfishness and wanting to do things our own way.

And because we have all been there, there is no one in this room who does not need forgiveness.

We also learn something about the father from this verse:

**The Father Allows Him to Go**.

Rather than retaliating against his son’s bad behavior, the father allows him to go.

It is the gift of God’s free will for us to choose our way, but if we choose our own way, we have to accept the responsibility for it, as the son in our story will soon find out.

Luke 15:13-14 “**Not many days later, the younger son gathered all he had and took a journey into a far country, and there he squandered his property in reckless living. 14 And when he had spent everything, a severe famine arose in that country, and he began to be in need (**he began to starve).

In a sense, some of you have made your home in a distant land. You are living far from truth and have made your home outside of God’s will.

This son has gone to a foreign country, blown through the money, and found himself in trouble. He has nothing.

Verses 15-17 say eventually, “**So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed pigs. 16 And he was longing to be fed with the pods that the pigs ate, and no one gave him anything. 17 “But when he came to himself, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired servants have more than enough bread, but I perish here with hunger!**

The son begins to realize that he doesn’t have it figured out like he thought he did. He comes to the end of himself.

He thought that his father’s home handcuffed him, but now he realizes that what he thought were handcuffs were actually guardrails.

The father was looking out for him, he wasn’t limiting him.

The son begins working for a gentile. This would be the equivalent of being in the most embarrassing, vulnerable, and needy place you could be in life.

He is at the lowest place of his life; he has nothing to give and nothing to receive. He feels like he has nowhere to turn, and he realizes dependence on his father was not weak, it was wise.

In verses 18- 24, the son says, “**I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. 19 I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants.”’**

**20 And he arose and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him.**

**21 And the son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’**

**22 But the father said to his servants, ‘Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet.**

**23 And bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate. 24 For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.’ And they began to celebrate**.

The son expected to receive what he deserved because of his sin against his father. Yet, while he was still a long way off, his father saw him coming and he ran toward his son.

The father did not wait until the son got to him. He did not wait for the right speech, the right explanation, or the right time.

**THE FATHER RAN TO HIM.**

In a culture where senior figures were far too dignified to run anywhere, this man lifts his cloak and barrels toward his son as soon as he sees him on the horizon.

The implication here is that the father didn’t just happen to look out over the fields and catch a glimpse of his son coming.

No! The father was actively, eagerly longing and looking for his son’s return. This is a great picture of the unconditional love of God.

At the very moment you realize that you are in need of the Father, even while you are still a long ways off, He is running toward you.

Can you picture being there in that moment?

His son doesn’t smell good, he looks the worst he ever has, he has no money, he is homeless, and he is completely vulnerable.

Surely the father would wait until he got cleaned up.

Surely he would comment on his current state and suggest for him to appear before him with a little more dignity than shredded clothing and scrawny bones.

However, the father does not see his ruin, he sees his response.

The words of the father show his heart and priorities, “This son was dead and is alive, he was lost and now is found.”

**No matter how far you’ve turned from God, no matter what you’ve gone through, no matter what state you are currently in:**

**The Father does not see your ruin, He sees your response.**

His forgiveness is barreling toward you, His love is embracing you, and He is celebrating that you have come home.

As Jesus shared this story, He knew the power of God’s forgiveness changes lives forever.

It welcomes the one once living in a foreign land back into the family.

No matter how far you’ve run, no matter what pit you are in, God wants to see you coming home.

The story doesn’t end here though. Jesus continues by saying in Luke 15:25-32: “**Now his older son was in the field, and as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing. 26 And he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant.**

**27 And he said to him, ‘Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fattened calf, because he has received him back safe and sound.’**

**28 But he was angry and refused to go in. His father came out and entreated him, 29 but he answered his father, ‘Look, these many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command, yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might celebrate with my friends. 30 But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him!’**

**31 And he said to him, ‘Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. 32 It was fitting to celebrate and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found.**’”

The older brother was angry that his younger brother was receiving a celebration when he had worked for and earned his inheritance his whole life.

He was angry that grace was extended in a situation that didn’t feel fair.

His heart was not for the lost, but for his own well-being.

The younger brother’s sin was not what distinguished him from the older brother, as the older brother thought; it was his repentance.

The younger son realized his need for the father and changed his ways completely. The father’s response was to throw a party and restore him completely to the family.

**You cannot have restoration without repentance, and because the son repented: The Father’s forgiveness restores him.**

The son could never have imagined the way the father would lavish his love on him. But the older brother couldn’t understand why he did.

Some of you are not the younger brother, but the older brother.

Some of you have done things “right”. You were raised with good morals and ethics, you’ve grown up in the church, and you never strayed.

But did you notice what the older brother chose to do when he found out his younger brother had repented?

“**The older brother was angry and wouldn’t go in.**”

The older brother was passive, stuck in legalism. He did not even try to understand the father’s heart, but immediately critiqued his younger brother.

Here are three signs you might be like the older brother of this parable:

1. You question when someone repents. You say something like, “We will see.”

2. You would rather critique than celebrate. You would rather find a reason not to celebrate than a reason to.

3. You don’t try to understand the Father’s heart for another person.

In Matthew 6:14-15 Jesus says, “**For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, 15  but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses**.”

Forgiveness is not just for us. When we receive the forgiveness of God, we are commanded to extend that same forgiveness to others.

In 2 Corinthians 5:17-19 the apostle Paul writes: “**Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.**

**18 All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; 19 that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation**.

If you need forgiveness, I’m here today to tell you that the Father is running toward you with his arms wide open.

Forgiveness is yours for the taking.

If you need to extend forgiveness, I’m here to today to tell you that the power of forgiveness does not come from your own strength, it rests in the message of the cross.

Christ endured a painful death he did not deserve to forgive our sins.

**BIG IDEA: Forgiveness is the fuel of a heart driven by Christ.**

When we as a church can receive and unleash forgiveness the way that Jesus modeled, our families, communities, and world will be transformed beyond what we could ever ask or imagine.

Let’s pray.

**Benediction**

**“The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you; the Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace.” (Num. 6:24-26)**