

## LET'S CELEBRATE CHURCH 26<sup>TH</sup> June 2016

### **The Dad who forgives**

What happens when you do something wrong? What happens when as a 10-year old you break the window with your football? Or make the washing dirty? Do you get a row? Does the row last for always? Do you forgive the person who has done something wrong? Are you forgiven?

Jesus told a story about a boy who made a mistake and got something wrong and we find out that he made life really hard for himself and for his dad, but his dad would forgive him his mistake. Here's a story that tells us what God is like.

Here's the dad and his two sons; I'll tell you about the older brother later! The younger son decided that he wanted his share of his dad's money and he wanted it now. Dad didn't want to give it to him because he sort of knew what was going to happen; parents are like that! But he gave his son what he wanted and the son left home and went abroad and took all this money. Because he had lots of money that he was spending he had lots of friends and soon the money was all gone. When the money was gone, so were his friends and soon the son had nothing and was all alone.

He tried to find a job, but the only job he could find was feeding pigs on a farm; it was the worst job in the world, smelly and horrible and the pigs were unclean animals for the Jews listening to the story, they kept people away from God. He was hungry, but all he could find to eat was the pigs' food, he had no money to buy food. Life couldn't get any worse. Then he came to his senses and realised that the servants on father's farm were better off than he was, so he made up his mind to go home. He prepared a speech for his father about how sorry he was and please could he have a job as a servant and he would make it all up to his father.

What the son didn't know was that his father was out every day watching for him coming home. The father was sure that his son would come home, and longed for his son to come home, so he watched the road every day for his son to come. One day, he was delighted because saw a figure walking along the road and recognised it as his son; he ran out to meet him and gave him a hug and welcomed him home. The son tried to read his prepared speech and ask for a job as a servant, but his father had already sent for a robe, a ring and some shoes – all signs that he was a son! There was a party to celebrate.

Here is a dad who forgives: he treats his son as if he had done nothing wrong. That's what God is like with us: he treats us as if we've done nothing wrong, and forgives us our faults and mistakes. Jesus died that we might be forgiven, to take away our sin. The Father blesses us, loves us, helps us, cares for us, listens to us – all as if we've never ever done anything wrong. That's forgiveness; God is the Father who forgives. That's why Jesus told this story and that's what we celebrate today: we celebrate Church, and church and the Christian faith is built on the Father who loves us and forgives us and does so because Jesus has died for us. In a moment we're going to celebrate what we like about church, but we have to start here, with God the Father who forgives.

### **You have everything**

There are two brothers in this story; we've talked about the little brother and what he did; but what about the big brother? What do you make of the big brother and his story? Is he Mr Grumpy? He's certainly not happy with his little brother and complains to his

dad about all of this and how little brother has wasted all this money and 'now you're throwing a party for him; how stupid is that!' Something of that we can understand, because he's right! Little brother has wasted dad's money and now he's home so there is a party! I think we might join in that complaint! There are probably some big brothers who still would make that complaint if they saw their little brother or little sister wasting dad's money!

"It's not fair!" Have you ever said that? To your brother or sister or mum or dad? Have you said it to God? That's what big brother says to his dad; "It's not fair!" "I've never disobeyed you; I've not wasted your money; I've not run away abroad for a good time! But you've never given me a party; you've never given me the chance to celebrate with my friends; It's just not fair!" Again deep sense of it being not fair. Look at what someone else has been given and big brother feels he's been given nothing.

*"Everything I have is yours!"* Wow! "You didn't need to ask; you already have everything!" In the story, Jesus creates the idea that the father has given both sons everything he has; the younger son has gone off and wasted his, and the older son hasn't even realised what he has! Everything that belongs to the father belongs to his son; the son is rich with his father's money, but he didn't realise it; he already had everything he needed without having to ask or complain. It was his already.

There were people listening to this story who were complaining that Jesus was spending too much time with the wrong people, the tax collectors and sinners, with people who were wasting their lives and wasting the love that God has for them. Jesus was wasting His time with them. But Jesus wanted to show how much the Father loved these people and at the same time wanted to show the love that the Father has for those who were complaining too. "You have everything!" These people who were complaining had everything they needed from God – God loved them; God blessed them; God had been patient, kind, generous to them – they had everything they needed; but they didn't see; they didn't realize!

"Let's celebrate church" is such a good thing to do because it helps us see what God has given us. He has given us each other, not just as friends but as the family of God in Jesus; He has given us a place to come for worship, let's not take that for granted; He has given us the Bible to read so that we can learn about Him; He has given us prayer and we can ask for help, strength, grace; He has loved us with a love that is new every day; He has forgiven us our sins and faults; He has promised to be with us always and everywhere; He has called us His children. All of these are gifts and graces for us to celebrate as Church; it is so easy to forget, to complain, to say "life's not fair!" and at times life is like that. Here is the other side of the coin: "You have everything!" Here is something to celebrate: the church, the gospel, Jesus, the grace of God, each other. Here is something to celebrate; you have everything! Realise just how much you have! See how much God has given us; let us rejoice and celebrate.