CHRIST CHURCH SMALL GROUPS

The Fourth Sunday in Lent – The Week beginning March 30, 2025

Read Luke 15:1-3, 11b-32:

All the tax collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to Jesus. And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, "This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them." So Jesus told them this parable: "There was a man who had two sons. The younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of the property that will belong to me.' So he divided his property between them. A few days later the younger son gathered all he had and traveled to a distant country, and there he squandered his property in dissolute living. When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs. He would gladly have filled himself with the pods that the pigs were eating; and no one gave him anything. But when he came to himself he said, 'How many of my father's hired hands have bread enough and to spare, but here I am dying of hunger! I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands."' So he set off and went to his father. But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him. Then the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' But the father said to his slaves, 'Quickly, bring out a robe—the best one—and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!' And they began to celebrate. Now his elder son was in the field; and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. He called one of the slaves and asked what was going on. He replied, 'Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has got him back safe and sound.' Then he became angry and refused to go in. His father came out and began to plead with him. But he answered his father, 'Listen! For all these years I have been working like a slave for you, and I have never disobeyed your command; yet you have never given me even a young goat so that I might celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours came back, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fatted calf for him!' Then the father said to him, 'Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found.'"

Background: This parable or story has been described as a gospel within a gospel. A father, a landowner, has two sons. The younger of the two sons no longer wishes to remain at home with his father and brother. He decides to set out on his own. Before he does so, he asks his father for the share of his inheritance. The son then travels to a "distant country" where he squanders his inheritance in dissolute living. At the same time that he runs out of money, there is a severe famine on the land, and so to keep himself alive, he takes a lowly job feeding pigs. Seeing how bad things have worked out for him, he swallows his pride and returns home to his father.

Talking Points:
- Being free from family ties has benefits and drawbacks. Can you name them?
- What does the younger son lose when he is away from home?
- Is the elder brother justified in his complaint?
- What does the younger son's relationship with his father teach us about our relationship with God?

Merciful Lord, you know our struggle to serve you: when sin spoils our lives and overshadows our hearts, come to our aid and turn us back to you again; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.