
Narrative Lectionary

Year 3 | The Year of Luke

Scripture Readings

March 7, 2021

*The Third Sunday
in Lent*

About the text

WHO DESERVES A BREAK?

If you see the world as a place where you make your own way, where nothing is given to you, and the greater reward comes from the greater effort...well, you have an answer in mind.

The common theme in these three stories agrees with you: No one deserves a break. The shepherd who lost a sheep, the woman who lost a coin, the son who lost his family—they were neglectful. The son's actions moved beyond that: he was arrogant and rude to his family.

The crowds listening to Jesus' stories are thinking: I'm not negligent. I'm not careless. I'm not selfish. Each story starts with implied virtue.

But each ends answering a question: Can anything separate us from God?



Luke 15:1-32

1 Now all the tax collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to him. 2 And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, "This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them."

3 So he told them this parable: 4 "Which one of you, having a hundred sheep and losing one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the one that is lost until he finds it? 5 When he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders and rejoices. 6 And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.' 7 Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.

8 "Or what woman having ten silver coins, if she loses one of them, does not light a lamp, sweep the house, and search carefully until she finds it? 9 When she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost.' 10 Just so, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents."

11 Then Jesus said, "There was a man who had two sons. 12 The younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me

1 By this time a lot of men and women of doubtful reputation were hanging around Jesus, listening intently. 2 The Pharisees and religion scholars were not pleased, not at all pleased. They growled, "He takes in sinners and eats meals with them, treating them like old friends." 3 Their grumbling triggered this story.

4 "Suppose one of you had a hundred sheep and lost one. Wouldn't you leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the lost one until you found it? 5 When found, you can be sure you would put it across your shoulders, rejoicing, 6 and when you got home call in your friends and neighbors, saying, 'Celebrate with me! I've found my lost sheep!' 7 Count on it—there's more joy in heaven over one sinner's rescued life than over ninety-nine good people in no need of rescue.

8 "Or imagine a woman who has ten coins and loses one. Won't she light a lamp and scour the house, looking in every nook and cranny until she finds it? 9 And when she finds it you can be sure she'll call her friends and neighbors: 'Celebrate with me! I found my lost coin!' 10 Count on it—that's the kind of party God's angels throw every time one lost soul turns to God."

11 Then he said, "There was once a man who had two sons. 12 The younger said to his father, 'Father, I want right

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the share of the property that will belong to me.' So he divided his property between them. ¹³ 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. ¹⁴ When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that country, and he began to be in need. ¹⁵ 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. ¹⁶ He would gladly have filled himself with the pods that the pigs were eating; and no one gave him anything. ¹⁷ 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! ¹⁸ I will get up 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 like one of your hired hands.'" ²⁰ 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. ²¹ 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.' ²² 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. ²³ And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; ²⁴ for this son of mine was dead and is alive

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now what's coming to me.'

"So the father divided the property between them. ¹³ It wasn't long before the younger son packed his bags and left for a distant country. There, undisciplined and dissipated, he wasted everything he had. ¹⁴ After he had gone through all his money, there was a bad famine all through that country and he began to hurt. ¹⁵ He signed on with a citizen there who assigned him to his fields to slop the pigs. ¹⁶ He was so hungry he would have eaten the corncobs in the pig slop, but no one would give him any.

¹⁷ "That brought him to his senses. He said, 'All those farmhands working for my father sit down to three meals a day, and here I am starving to death. ¹⁸ I'm going back to my father. I'll say to him, Father, I've sinned against God, I've sinned before you; ¹⁹ I don't deserve to be called your son. Take me on as a hired hand.' ²⁰ He got right up and went home to his father.

"When he was still a long way off, his father saw him. His heart pounding, he ran out, embraced him, and kissed him. ²¹ The son started his speech: 'Father, I've sinned against God, I've sinned before you; I don't deserve to be called your son ever again.'

²² "But the father wasn't listening. He was calling to the servants, 'Quick. Bring a clean set of clothes and dress him. Put the family ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. ²³ Then get a grain-fed heifer and roast it. We're going to feast! We're going to have a

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again; he was lost and is found!' And they began to celebrate.

25 "Now his elder son was in the field; and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing.

26 He called one of the slaves and asked what was going on. 27 He replied, 'Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has got him back safe and sound.' 28 Then he became angry and refused to go in. His father came out and began to plead with him. 29 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. 30 But when this son of yours came back, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fatted calf for him!' 31 Then the father said to him, 'Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. 32 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.'"

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wonderful time! 24 My son is here—given up for dead and now alive! Given up for lost and now found!' And they began to have a wonderful time.

25 "All this time his older son was out in the field. When the day's work was done he came in. As he approached the house, he heard the music and dancing.

26 Calling over one of the houseboys, he asked what was going on. 27 He told him, 'Your brother came home. Your father has ordered a feast—barbecued beef!—because he has him home safe and sound.'

28 "The older brother stalked off in an angry sulk and refused to join in. His father came out and tried to talk to him, but he wouldn't listen. 29 The son said, 'Look how many years I've stayed here serving you, never giving you one moment of grief, but have you ever thrown a party for me and my friends? 30 Then this son of yours who has thrown away your money on whores shows up and you go all out with a feast!'

31 "His father said, 'Son, you don't understand. You're with me all the time, and everything that is mine is yours—³²but this is a wonderful time, and we had to celebrate. This brother of yours was dead, and he's alive! He was lost, and he's found!'"

Psalm 119:167-176

167 My soul keeps your decrees; I love them exceedingly. · 168 I keep your precepts and decrees, for all my ways are before you.

169 Let my cry come before you, O LORD; give me understanding according to your word. ·

170 Let my supplication come before you; deliver me according to your promise. · 171 My lips will pour forth praise, because you teach me your statutes. · 172 My tongue will sing of your promise, for all your commandments are right. · 173 Let your hand be ready to help me, for I have chosen your precepts. · 174 I long for your salvation, O LORD, and your law is my delight. · 175 Let me live that I may praise you, and let your ordinances help me. · 176 I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek out your servant, for I do not forget your commandments.

167 My soul guards and keeps all your instructions—oh, how much I love them! · 168 I follow your directions, abide by your counsel; my life's an open book before you.

169 Let my cry come right into your presence, GOD; provide me with the insight that comes only from your Word.

170 Give my request your personal attention, rescue me on the terms of your promise. · 171 Let praise cascade off my lips; after all, you've taught me the truth about life! · 172 And let your promises ring from my tongue; every order you've given is right. · 173 Put your hand out and steady me since I've chosen to live by your counsel. · 174 I'm homesick, GOD, for your salvation; I love it when you show yourself! · 175 Invigorate my soul so I can praise you well, use your decrees to put iron in my soul. · 176 And should I wander off like a lost sheep—seek me! I'll recognize the sound of your voice.

The Narrative Lectionary presents the story of God's work in humanity through a single Gospel each year. This is Year 3: The Year of Luke.