

Rev. George Miller
March 23, 2025
Luke 15:1-32

On Friday, I had breakfast with a long-time mentor, Rev. Scott Davis, head of the Clinical Pastoral unit I took at SLUH in 2003. He taught me how to lead and be a pastoral presence, becoming one of the men who shaped my life.

There's my grandfather, life-long fisherman, World War II vet, VFW Chaplain, milkman.

He loved his beer and his hand rolled cigarettes. By his living room chair sat a jar of tobacco, a jar of quarters and a jar filled with pink peppermints.

We'd fish for flounder in a rowboat or catch shiners while sitting on the dock. Each visit ended with getting to take one peppermint and one quarter.

In 1986, he had a heart attack; doctors told him to no longer smoke or drink. After giving it a try, he decided "If I can't do the things I enjoy, then life's not worth living."

He resumed enjoying his beer and cigarettes. It's not that Grandpa had a desire to die but he had a *passion to live*.

I am so proud of him for that choice. He showed what a life worth living looks like; giving an empowering glance at how to face our mortality.

My Dad- Vietnam Vet, Eagle Scout, New York City Cop, leader of Troop 100.

He drove with the window down, hand on top of the car, tapping to the beat of the music. Watching him is how I learned to keep rhythm.

One day in 1976 we went to Rickel Home Center. I'm wearing my brand-new Robin Hood hat; Dad has the window down, tapping to the music.

In the parking lot, a gust of wind steals my hat, blowing it all over the place. I began to cry; I loved that hat so much.

My Dad, this Vietnam Vet New York cop runs around the parking lot trying to get my hat. He stoops; the wind blows it away. How urgent he moved; the focus it required.

How foolish he may have looked, trying to reach my hat as cars passed by. My Dad did not stop, did not quit, nor did he shame me. He took what it took to retrieve my hat.

That which was lost- he found. *That's LOVE*.

Thank God for men like Rev. Davis, Grandpa Miller, Dad, who demonstrated what it means to be man.

They are why I'm comfortable in my skin and my identity; why I welcome the many ways the Bible speaks about God.

If you are comfortable with *YOU*, then you become comfortable with God being referred to as a Lion and a hen, as a father who fights for the family and a nursing mother.

Our text today is ripe with images of hugs and shoulders, sweeping and celebration.

Jesus is talking to sinners and tax collectors, Pharisees and scribes. Since we can "read from below," we know female benefactors and disciples are there.

Jesus tells 3 parables to make them think about God. One is God as a shepherd with strong shoulders. The second is God as a woman with a light and broom.

The third portrays God as a Father who is rich; like *rich* rich; a person of power.

He's got land, servants, rings, sandals, a selection of robes; able to put on a full fiesta with a fatted calf, musicians, pretzel bites with 7 dipping sauces and margaritas of every flavor!

This Father is blessed with abundance, able to give away a portion of what is his and still have enough to fully live.

This man is Alpha Dad, yet see what he does; how he acts. The son is far away, the Father sees him. He runs, filled with compassion, to his son, puts his arms around him, kisses him.

Before the son can even finish his apology, the Dad prepares a celebration.

This story has a deepness of detail. To see his son far way suggests that Dad was waiting and watching for a long time, scanning the horizon daily to spot his son.

The Dad is filled compassion; love within your womb.

This Alpha of a man, in charge of slaves and land, fields and slaughter, has been waiting for oh so long. This Alpha of a man has a loving, deep bellied reaction to seeing his son.

He runs. He runs to his son. He runs to his child.

Back then, running was not something grown men did. Running was looked down upon, seen as the act of fools or children. If folk saw you run they'd think you were daft.

But this Dad- he did not care. He runs to his Son without giving a wit what anyone thinks. And then, he embraces his son, hugs him, kisses him.

When the older son gets mad and refuses to engage in the fun, this Dad does not shun, shame, or discredit him.

He simply says “Son, you are always with me. What I have is yours. We celebrate because our family is restored.”

This man not only has enough love to welcome back a son who squandered *everything*, but love for the son who refuses to participate the party.

This image of God as Father is powerful. It celebrates the Sacred Masculine and all the positive, powerful things that men are and can be.

Jesus shows a Dad whose love is big enough that he can feel compassion for his child, hugging and kissing him just as a Mother would.

This Dad that’s presented to the scribes and sinners, female benefactors and male disciples

- Is one Who knows what a life worth living is all about

- Knows how valuable a coin is and what money is meant for

- Is willing to run for their child even if they look foolish.

For weeks we’ve discussed women and female images of God; how good it is to also see a multi-dimensional image of God as male.

This image of God as Father is one to add to our list as we continue to grow, find ways to be the hands and feet of Jesus,

and live the prophetic statement that “Love Grows Here.”

An image of God full of joy, full of love, full of patience and understanding.

A God that is welcoming and embracing, rich with care and concern.

For that, let us say “Amen.”