The Parable of the Inheritance
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Texts: Isaiah 58:6-12
Luke 15:1-7

Two years ago as Caldwell Presbyterian was celebrating its 100th anniversary, I had the opportunity to share a bit of the history of the church during worship. This was a warts and all history that was part of our goal to figure out where we might go in our next 100 years. In 1912 this neighborhood, now called Elizabeth, was a new street car suburb on the edge of uptown. Merchants, office workers, and small business owners who were moving into the neighborhood organized a small congregation and built a wooden building. In 1914 the church called Knox Presbyterian, built a multi-purpose building. What was then the sanctuary is now the Shelby room and our church offices. Growth was rapid and in 1922 this sanctuary was built from a bequeath from the estate of Sallie Caldwell White and the name was changed to Caldwell Memorial Presbyterian. By the1940s the church congregation numbered over 1100 and the Price Building and Belk Hall were built. A long painful decline followed, until in 2006 the congregation was down to fewer than 50 members.

It was only when I was working on cleaning up my notes that I realized that I had done zero research on the Caldwells, which is especially the story of this space that we're in today. I find the story poignant, painful and redemptive and I'm honored to share this parable with you along with the parable of the lost sheep that was read earlier.

Let us pray together: God of all the universe's stories, we thank you for this place and the people here. I ask that these stories illuminate our understanding of you and one another. Amen

The Caldwells were justifiably proud of the role their family played in the history of our country. Their ancestors, whom we now call the Scotch Irish, had left Ireland and then Pennsylvania in the mid1700s and had come to North Carolina seeking religious freedom and land. Among the Caldwell's ancestors were several revolutionary war heroes, teachers, doctors, and among the first Presbyterian ministers in Mecklenburg County. These were the folks that made Cornwallis call Charlotte "a hornet's nest of rebellion" and whose efforts had stopped the British in the south which led to the ultimate success of the American patriots. You can read about them in your bulletin insert.

Let me begin with what I'm calling "The parable of the Inheritance" in the year 1860. It was a good moment for the Caldwells. Sallie, the eldest daughter married Dr. Edward White in October. Sallie's father, David (called Alex or D.A), valued education and was on the first board of trustees at Davidson College. Their home, really a plantation, called Glenwood was a haven for intellectuals. He had sent Sallie to Greensboro to Edgeworth Female Seminary, one of the few secondary schools in the state that educated women. Every account of Martha, Sallie's mother, paints the picture of a lively, generous woman. Sallie's brother, John, called Edward, was a student at Davidson College. David the patriarch must have felt justifiable proud of his accomplishments. After all his father had suffered from a debilitating mental illness and for many years of his childhood he had lived on his uncle's property and then became his overseer. He had been left over 650 acres of prime piedmont farm land. He was a capable man and had inherited the bulk of this large estate in spite of having many cousins. The family was also well known for their religious faith and their staunch Presbyterianism.

By 1865, life was much more bitter for the Caldwells. Sallie's husband had died in 1862 due to camp fever while serving as a Confederate Army doctor. Her only child, Edith, had died at age 3. Edward, had been among the very earliest North Carolinians to join the Confederate Army. As part of the "Hornets Nest Rifles" and then the First North Carolina Volunteers he likely saw service in one of the earliest land battles of the Civil War – the Battle of Big Bethel and the last battle at Appomattox. He left home a privileged only son and returned home a hardened veteran.

Edward then headed towards medical school in New York and returned to live at Glenwood and practice in the Davidson area. He never married. Meanwhile his sister and parents moved to uptown Charlotte. Sallie never re-married, she was a teacher and a fixture in the Charlotte social scene.

The long decline of the family's finance and civic standing had begun and at the tail end of that was the estate of Sallie Caldwell White where those managing her estate chose to donate $55,000 to build this sanctuary.

I'm a sentimental person and there is something very poignant and slightly romantic about this story. But, it's only the partial truth and we need to look squarely at what is happening both with the Caldwells and with ourselves.

Our scripture today is the parable of the lost sheep. In it the Good Shepherd leaves the 99 sheep and goes out to seek the one who is lost. He then carries it back and rejoices that it is back among the fold.

Often we, like the Caldwells, are the lost sheep… and don't even realize it. In what ways am I, and we as a church, self satisfyingly complacent? In their case I imagine that because they were on the top of the social, political and economic hierarchy that they felt all cozily gathered into God's enclosure. They were "safe and secure from all alarms" among the 99 "virtuous" sheep. However, today we can clearly see that they were so, so blind and lost.

How were they lost? The answer is a part of the story that is painful because it involves slavery. Even in this safe space it is difficult to talk about race. I feel vulnerable, because I am a white person, to be talking about these issues because I know how easy it is to misstep. To tell the truth, I don't want you, my friends, to think less of me if I say something that shows a lack of understanding. There are deep and real feelings here. I know that for some of us who are descended from enslaved people, talking about slavery can painful. For some of us of European descent, I know that there are feelings of guilt and a heaviness because of our own or our family's history with people of other races. Our pastor has talked about his family's history of ownership of slaves from the pulpit, and many of you over the past weeks have also mentioned to me that your family has a similar history.

In Jesus' time, Shepherds searching out lost sheep faced real dangers but still went out to find the lost. These days I don't want to leave home without my cell phone and I'm not in a wilderness with wild animals, at night, without a flashlight like I'm imagining the shepherds were in Jesus' parable. But the instructions are clear, we also must venture into our own time's "dangerous" territories to claim what is ours and what belongs to us. It's a moment that calls us to be brave in seeking an understanding of an uncomfortable truth.

Here's one part of this dangerous territory: the Caldwells and Davidsons owned slaves. The wealth that built this building came from individuals being held against their will, enforced by the threat and

actuality of violence, torture and deprivation. These patriots who fought for freedom in the Revolutionary War and loved God somehow justified with-in themselves depriving others of their freedom.

Our God, our good shepherd, is relentless in looking for us in dangerous places. If one of our ancestors was a slave then we can know that even in those terrible circumstance, they were either with God safely in his enclosure, God was carrying them or God was pursuing them. We here at Caldwell share in this understanding as we sing songs that reach back into the African American experience with for instance the solemn "I want Jesus to walk with me" which we will sing today.

When I first learned about this, I did see this space differently. I loved it less. It was somehow tainted. I love it in a different way now. I've always felt a strong sense of stewardship because in 2006 the Caldwell folks basically turned it over to a small group of us. Another layer of stewardship must be added as we today honor in a small way the forced sacrifice that made this space possible. In this way I see us as the Good Shephard, going out and claiming what was lost. One of the painful things about slavery is that people lose their family history. However, we do know some of the names of people owned by the Caldwells, because they are found in deeds and wills listed alongside household goods and land transfers. I'd like to share the names now of some of those owned by our Caldwell family: Easter, William, Umphrey, Plum, Cyrus, Phillas, Lethy, Hannah, Henery, Nancy, Custis, James, Caleb and Sucry. It's a blessing to remember them on All Saints Day.

It's also time today to acknowledge, once again, the truth that structural inequities remain and that there is such a thing as white privilege. White privilege was blinding to Caldwells then and just as blinding to some of us at Caldwell Church today. Neither the civil war, nor reconstruction, nor the civil rights movement, nor current efforts have brought full justice and equality of opportunity to people of color. I must open my eyes to see that most institutions and buildings, if their history were known, would tell the same story. Our story is painfully common but we have the blessing to have this truth to deepen our understanding and relationships with one another.

An obvious question is how did the Caldwells treat their slaves? When this building was dedicated in 1922, there was an extensive story about the dedication in the newspaper. There is a description of how the Caldwells had received a barrel of fish meant for the slaves. Martha, who again was Sallie's mother, is credited for her great kindness in giving it to them a day early when they pleaded with her. The narrator, who knew the Caldwells, implies that she is almost too kind. We can all see the obvious, why didn't she see the true gift would have been to not enslave people? What was really happening here? Were the slaves feeling humiliated or were they pleased with deftly influencing the situation? We don't know. I have to think that David Alexander Caldwell was harsh – his uncle's plantation had among the most slaves in the county and violence and strictness must have been used for control. After all, history has shown that harsh treatment of slaves was standard practice as many of you saw in the movie "12 Years A Slave."

Are you ready for another truth? If there are living descendents of the Caldwells then they are African Americans.

- Edward Caldwell never married. He had a long term relationship with an African American woman named Susan Gaston. Susan, who was the child of a black woman and a white man, was likely enslaved by the Torrance family and was sent from Alabama to North Carolina at age 18 to nurse one of that family. She apparently had several children with her one time owner John Torrance. The plantation of John Torrance and the Caldwell plantation are fairly

close together. She began a relationship with Edward, moved into a house on his property and he was the father of 6 of her 11 children. She and many of her children are buried at an African American church started after the civil war called Caldwell Presbyterian Church. This land was donated by our David Caldwell.

To talk about this relationship we must acknowledge that Edward and Susan's relationship could have been many different things – ranging from physical or economic coercion to it essentially being a common law marriage. In 1958, LeGette Blythe wrote a novel based on this relationship and Davidson College has information about them in their archives. However, these texts highlight the stereotypes and biases of the author's time more than they illuminate what the relationship between Edward and Susan was. Again we don't know. There are several signs that it was indeed a long term relationship including his name on the marriage and death certificates of his children and the fact that she and several of their children are mentioned in his will. In fact, the last line of the will is a fatherly request for good behavior from his daughter -"Allow Corrie Gaston her home on this place as long as she remains single and is obedient and respectful to her mother." But in no place in the will does he name them as his children.

And here's another part of the inequity of our systems. Of the 800+ acres Edward and Sallie owned, Edward's children and Susan were left fewer than 75 acres. The building of the sanctuary is possible because Edward and Susan's children did not receive their full inheritance. Indeed, it would have been highly unusual for the time for Edward to leave a full inheritance to his black children. In the funeral service program for one of his children, Corrie Gaston McCauley, it mentions that she did attend high school and was a teacher. However, her occupation and those of the other children, are listed on their census and death certificates as laborers, farmers and domestics. This was from a family that valued education for both men and women as one of their top priorities and so again we can see the blindness and the lost-ness of that generation.

Through various contacts we are currently searching for descendents of Susan and Edward. We believe that we have found two descendents of Susan but think that they are descended from the oldest son. We know not all may want to know this history because it is such a painful subject.

So, what do we do now? First, we are blessed to have this story because today Caldwell gets to be the "lost sheep" that God rejoices over and celebrates when we return. Today on both communion and All Saints Day we can bring our ancestors with us to level ground at the foot of the cross.

Secondly, we must do our best to fulfill the exhortation in Isaiah 58 which says

6 "Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen:
to loose the chains of injustice and untie
the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed
free
and break every yoke?"

Then further down…

"If you do away with the yoke of oppression, with
the pointing finger and malicious talk, 10 and if you
spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry and

satisfy the needs of the oppressed, then your light
will rise in the darkness,
and your night will become like the noonday."

He's saying essentially, that he's not looking for the typical fasting that the Israelites offered, but instead to establish a new Koinonia, a new community that is based on justice. In the words of a favorite song sung here "to break every chain." Today in the United States, our chains aren't the ones of slavery but remain ones of lack of equal opportunity in housing and health care and education to name just a few. When we volunteer at Habitat or Merry Oaks or Koinonia we offer the type of "fast" that Isaiah is talking about.

But, this is a key moment in the life of this church. We must do more. We need to deeply educate ourselves on these issues, put aside fear and talk to one another and others in our community who are different from us. We need to move deeply towards solidarity and action with those who are struggling with inequity. We can't be satisfied with only occasional volunteer efforts however satisfying and helpful as they are. Change happens when folks are in relationship with one another and when your future is as important to me as my own future.

Therefore, let us as Isaiah said "rebuild ancient ruins, repair the broken walls," and let "our light…rise."

For those interested in the history

Among their family's ancestors were the revolutionary war hero, doctor and teacher David and his Rachel Caldwell. David Caldwell's Log College (http://www.learnnc.org/lp/editions/nchist-newnation/5229) was the first college in North Carolina and was established in 1766.

Another ancestor was Rev. Alexander Craighead came to NC because he was too revolutionary in his preaching and is considered one of fathers of Presbyterianism in Charlotte.
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alexander_Craighead

https://archive.org/details/sketchesofearlys00alex This book printed in 1890 has information on David Caldwell and his parents (page 28) and you may want to look at page 87 as well to see how 35 years after slavery ended it was romanticized.

On his mother's side David Caldwell was a grandson of one of the one of the signers of the Mecklenburg Declaration, Major John Davidson whose property is now called Rural Hill.
http://www.ruralhill.net/ThenNow.asp

History on David Caldwell's mother and father – Sarah Davidson and Rev. Alexander Caldwell.
http://ruralhill.net/pdf/TheDavidsonsofRuralHill.pdf - page 28, 62
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John Edward's civil war participation – He was part of the "Hornets Nest Rifles" (Company B) Part of the First North Carolina Volunteers, known as the Bethel Regiment.
http://www.cmstory.org/history/hornets/wartime.htm (see The Civil War)

Sallie went to Greensboro to attend Edgeworth Female Seminary
(https://archive.org/details/annualcatalogueo00edge - page 4 lists Sallie as a student and you may also want to look at the impressive curriculum.