

63. 15v11-32 Jesus tells a story about a father's love

Informing:

- In this special story, Jesus explains more fully to the Pharisees and Teachers of the Law (who are like the older son), why he is welcoming people who are like the younger son.
- The younger son asked for his inheritance, which would normally have been given to him after his father's death. When an inheritance was divided, the eldest son was given a double amount. This would cover the expenses of having overall responsibility for the family. So a third would have been given to the younger son and two thirds to the older son. So when the younger son came back, it did not mean that the older son would lose anything of his personal third.
- For a Jew to join with someone from another country was considered unlawful. (Acts 10v28)
- As part of showing that the Jews were different from other nations, there were some animals that they were not allowed to eat. Pigs were among these animals that were called "unclean".

Introducing:

- Jesus, in welcoming the tax collectors and "sinners" is likening himself to the father in the story, who is a picture of our heavenly Father showing his love for us. The father goes out to the son who had been away. He is in a hurry to welcome him home. He accepts him, even before the son says anything. He straight away gives him everything that shows he is properly and fully back in his place in the family. He goes out to the older son who does not want to come in to the celebration. Even when that son speaks in an angry dishonouring way, the father says to him the beautiful words, "My boy, you are always with me, and everything I have is yours."
- Jesus is making it clear that his love for the tax collectors and "sinners" does not make his love for the Pharisees and Teachers of the Law any less. He wants them all to be happy and to be at home with him and with one another.

Inspiring:

- What happened to the young man in the far away country is what the Holy Spirit does for people who have gone away from God. The Holy Spirit can help them to remember Father's love for them, to realise where they have gone wrong, and to return to their proper relationship with Father.

Instructing:

- Lessons from the younger son: 1) However attractive it may seem, going our own way rather than God's way will always result in loss, never in gain. 2) Whatever mess we have made in our lives, we can be brought back to a proper place in God's family because he still loves us.
- Lessons from the older son: 1) We should be careful that in trying to live a life that pleases God, we do not just do things for him while we miss having the same heart as he has. 2) If we are close to Father, we should welcome and celebrate with people who come to God after being far away from his ways.
- The story that Jesus told is unfinished, and so makes us think what we would do. Did the older son accept what the father said and then go into the party? Would you? There will be times when we are angry or have a wrong attitude which the Holy Spirit will challenge us about. He wants to bring us into the full enjoyment that Father has for us. Let us not miss out by thinking wrongly about others or about Father's love for us.