

Hinde Street Methodist Church

Sunday 31st March 2019 10am

Revd Val Reid

Luke 15: 1-3, 11b-32

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

So he told them this parable:

Then Jesus said, '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 travelled 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." '

Sermon

Yovana Mendozar is an influencer.

For those of you, like me, who are a bit hazy on the world of influencers, that's someone who does a lot on social media with the aim of creating attention.

And making money.

Raw-vana, as she is known, has three million followers on YouTube and Instagram.

Her 'thing' is a raw vegan diet.

She promotes healthy eating – fruit, uncooked vegetables, seeds, sprouted grains.
If you put ‘raw vegan diet’ into Google, you get 109,000,000 results!
So it’s a popular thing.

A couple of weeks ago Raw-vana was spotted in a restaurant eating fish.
She tried to hide it from the person with the camera, but unsuccessfully.
The video was posted online.
Vegan YouTubers were furious!
Raw-vana was humiliated.

As the Fishgate drama proliferated online, and in newspapers around the world, Yovana Mendoza posted a video entitled ‘This is what is happening’.
She explained that she had stopped being a raw food vegan for health reasons.
She had digestive problems, her periods had become irregular, her doctor was worried.
She started eating animal protein to see if it would make a difference.
She was sorry for not being honest.

*We came to this world to grow, transform, contribute, and add value.
I choose to stay humble to learning, and I trust in this process.*

This week, 850,000 people have watched her ‘I’m sorry’ podcast.

Why am I telling this story?

Well, as I look around our world, I am conscious that saying sorry is not very common.
Sorry – I got it wrong.
I made a mistake.
I am willing to learn from this.

There are plenty of people in politics in our country who could learn from Raw-vana.
People who have made mistakes with massive consequences for the UK and for Europe.
People whose political views have shifted time and time again.
People who have railed against the current Brexit proposals one day, and then said they would vote for them the next, in the light of the Prime Minister’s offer to step down if she wins the vote.
Is that a ‘sorry’ which has integrity?

And what about all of us who voted in the original referendum in 2016?
There may well be plenty of us who feel we might have voted differently if we knew then what we know now.
But the debate has become so toxic, so polarised, that it’s hard to say sorry.
I got it wrong.
Admitting a mistake feels impossible in our culture of self-righteousness.

Jesus didn’t have a lot of time for self-righteousness.

He preferred to spend time with people who knew they'd made a mess of their lives and wanted to find a way forward.

Or perhaps a way back.

Today's parable of the prodigal son is so well-known, it's hard to know how to preach on it.

Especially in five minutes!

How many different ways are there to approach this profoundly disturbing and profoundly healing story?

But the thing that particularly struck me this week as I read and re-read those familiar words, is the willingness of the younger son to admit his mistakes.

To say sorry.

I got it wrong.

I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, 'Father, I have sinned...'

It takes a lot for us to find ourselves in a place where we can say that.

Say it to ourselves, let alone to another human being.

Or to God.

For this younger son it takes destitution.

A famine.

A gig-economy job in a foreign country.

Utter humiliation.

Like Raw-vana being videoed eating fish.

Richard Rohr, the Franciscan writer on spirituality, often reminds us that none of us want to get to that place.

Most of us will go to any lengths to avoid recognising and owning up to our own problems.

Our culture of self-sufficiency, of self-help, of self-confidence, precludes admitting weakness.

You can be anything you want to be if only you – practice mindfulness, adopt a power pose, eat a raw vegan diet...

No wonder that the first step of the twelve step programme for Alcoholics Anonymous is:

We admitted we were powerless over alcohol – that our lives had become unmanageable.

To come to a place where we know we are not coping – that often takes something catastrophic.

Something that forces us to face up to the truth – as the younger son in our story faces up to the truth of his situation, and the truth of his own responsibility for being there.

So our younger son makes a searching and fearless moral inventory of himself – step four.

He admits to himself – and to his father – the exact nature of his wrongs – step five.

He goes home.

In the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible, which we use here at Hinde Street, this story is headed *The parable of the prodigal and his brother.*

In the New International version, it is
The *parable of the lost son*.

I rather like this title.

The *parable of the lost son*.

Because – which son is lost?

The son who admits his mistake and turns home?

Or the son who cannot forgive his brother?

We don't know how the story ends.

The last thing we hear is the older brother refusing to come to the party.

And their father inviting him in.

Will this brother ever be able to admit his faults?

His judgementalism?

His self-pity?

His lack of self-esteem?

I don't know.

I like to hope so.

But it leaves me with some questions about me.

My own ability to admit my mistakes.

To say sorry.

And my own reluctance to accept apology from others.

To forgive.

I want to see that in our politicians.

In public life.

But most of all I want to see it in myself.

Prayer from CTBI for Brexit

God of past, present and future,

be with us as we take our next steps as nations together.

May we strive to love our neighbour as ourselves,

Listening and speaking with respectful kindness,
embracing difference.

Remembering how much all have been forgiven by you,

May we offer friendship,
grant mercy,

And Seek peace and justice

in our shared future.

Amen.