

Toward Joy - Luke 15:11–24 - The Way Forward — August 23rd

Purpose

To help us see that repentance is not meant to be driven by shame or condemnation, but by the Father's gracious invitation to return home. The way forward begins by moving toward the Father, toward one another, and toward joy.

Icebreaker

When you hear words like *confession* or *repentance*, what do you tend to feel first: fear, shame, resistance, hope, relief, or something else?

Scripture - Primary Text: Read aloud - Luke 15:11–24. Additional Texts: Romans 2:4; 2 Corinthians 7:10; 1 John 1:8–9

Observations

- The younger son asks for the father's inheritance while separating himself from the father's presence.
- His sin takes him away from his father, home, community, and true identity.
- When the son "comes to himself," he begins moving back toward home, even though his motives still seem mixed.
- The father sees him while he is still far off, feels compassion, runs, embraces him, and kisses him.
- The robe, ring, and sandals publicly restore the son's identity and place in the family.
- The celebration is the father's idea. The son returns expecting employment, but the father gives restoration and joy.

Core Teaching

Many of us hear confession and repentance through a filter of condemnation. We think repentance means proving how bad we are, feeling enough shame, or working hard to repair ourselves. But Jesus' parable shows us something deeper and better.

The younger son's visible sins are obvious: selfishness, recklessness, wastefulness, and immorality. But Jesus shows that the deeper problem is distance from the father. The son does not merely make bad choices; he abandons relationship. He wants what the father can give more than he wants the father himself.

This matters because how we *diagnose the problem shapes how we understand the remedy*. If sin is only bad behavior, then the solution is simply better behavior. But if sin's deepest damage is distance from the Father, then repentance is not first about self-improvement. It is about coming home.

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The younger son's return is not especially impressive. He is hungry, desperate, and rehearsing a speech. His motives are mixed. Yet the father moves toward him before he can prove himself. The father runs, embraces, kisses, restores, and celebrates.

This reveals the heart of God. The Father is not indifferent to sin, but His heart is set on reunion. He is not waiting to humiliate returning sinners. He restores sons and daughters to communion, identity, and joy.

As CBC moves toward Sacred Assembly, this is the invitation: not condemnation, but return; not shame, but restored communion; not hiding, but coming home to the Father whose joy is greater than our shame.

Discussion Questions

1. Why is it important to distinguish between sin as bad behavior and sin as distance from the Father?
2. How can shame distort the way we hear words like confession, repentance, and return?
3. Where do you see the temptation to want the Father's gifts more than the Father Himself?
4. What does the son's movement toward home teach us about repentance, especially when our motives are mixed?
5. What does the father's response reveal about God's heart toward those who return?
6. Where might God be inviting you to move toward Him, toward others, and toward joy in this season?

Digging Deeper

Read Luke 15:1–2. How does the setting help explain why Jesus tells this parable?

Read 1 John 1:8–9. How does confession lead not to condemnation, but to cleansing and restored fellowship?

Prayer

Father, forgive us for wanting Your gifts more than Your presence. Forgive us for allowing sin, shame, self-protection, or self-righteousness to distance us from You and from one another. Help us believe that Your heart is full of compassion and joy toward those who return. Lead us toward honest repentance, restored communion, and the joy of coming home. Amen.