

Interactive lesson



picture from
<https://www.etsy.com/Listing/923692477/Large-midnight-blue-kintsugi-bowl>

How does pottery get broken? <Let them respond>

Do we typically try to fix the pottery, or just throw it away? <Let them respond>

Do you know what kintsugi is? <Let them respond>

Kintsugi is a Japanese art form in which broken pottery is mended in a way that highlights the seams where the item was broken. How do you think this blue bowl looks now? <Let them respond>

How do our relationships get broken?
<Let them respond>

Do we typically try to fix broken relationships, or just forget about them and move on?
<Let them respond>

What do you think the Holy Spirit can do with our broken relationships? <Let them respond>

If a broken relationship is renewed, will it be exactly the same as it was before? <Let them respond>

Like the kintsugi pottery, our mended relationships will not be exactly the same as they once were, but they can be beautiful while acknowledging the experience. May we all find the beauty of the Holy Spirit working in our relationships.

Gospel lesson

Leading up to today's Gospel reading, Pharisees and scribes had been grumbling about Jesus keeping company with tax collectors and sinners. So Jesus told parables of [a shepherd finding the one lost sheep out of a hundred] and of [a woman finding the lost one out of her ten silver coins] as causes for celebration. He then launched into this story.



picture from <https://www.freebibleimages.org/photos/prodigal-son/>

Luke 15: 11b-32

(NRSV)

^{11b} "There was a man who had two sons.

¹²The 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.

¹³A few days later the younger son gathered all he had and traveled to a distant country, and there he squandered his property in dissolute living.

¹⁴When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that country, and he began to be in need.

¹⁵So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs.

¹⁶He would gladly have filled himself with the pods that the pigs were eating; and no one gave him anything.

¹⁷But 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!

¹⁸I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you;

¹⁹I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands.'"

²⁰So 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.

²¹Then the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.'

²²But 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.

²³And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate;

²⁴for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!' And they began to celebrate.

²⁵ "Now his elder son was in the field; and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing.

²⁶ He called one of the slaves and asked what was going on.

²⁷ He replied, 'Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has got him back safe and sound.'

²⁸ Then he became angry and refused to go in. His father came out and began to plead with him.

²⁹ 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.

³⁰ But when this son of yours came back, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fatted calf for him!'

³¹ Then the father said to him, 'Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours.

³² 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.'"

The word of God for the people of God

<Hymn “Softly and Tenderly, Jesus Is Calling”

UMH #348>

Message: Lost & Found



pictures from <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship-planning/gathered-up-in-jesus>

Please pray with me?

Gracious God, as we take time now to further consider today’s scriptures, please

- speak Your words through my mouth,
- open our ears to hear Your message, and
- abide in our hearts,

That we may learn how to love each other beyond any faults we may see. Amen.



picture from <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship-planning/gathered-up-in-jesus/fourth-sunday-in-lent-year-c-lectionary-planning-notes/fourth-sunday-in-lent-year-c-graphics>

Today brings us to “Lost & Found.”

“Luke 15:1-3, 11b-32 is a familiar story to many, yet it bears retelling. The message of grace and acceptance no matter how far one falls is one we need to hear again and again.

But perhaps we might consider reflecting on the older brother as we worship this week. His story might come closer to ours than that of the younger prodigal son - particularly if we are trying to emphasize radical hospitality.”

When my younger brother got married, he was living in southern California nearby my oldest sister and my parents. Sadly, after several years, his marriage fell apart. He was granted joint custody of their children, but she was allowed to move to Utah with them because she had family there. So my brother followed them, moving to Salt Lake City and getting a job there.

However, it was a very ugly divorce. His ex-wife had apparently been coached on siphoning off all the money in their retirement savings as well as their normal checking account. And it only got worse in Utah, where my little brother had none of his family nearby to see what was going on and help him.

As I understand it, his ex-wife's sister worked for social services in the area and coached her sister on how to undermine my brother's rights through family court. Because anything he did that could be construed as weakness became fodder to prevent his time with his kids, he avoided seeking help such as counseling, and he grew depressed.

Then my oldest brother, my younger brother's idol, died of cancer. A few years later, my dad died. My brother's issues worsened; he lost his job and stopped fighting to see his children as much because of the hassles he ran into whenever he tried.

His ex-sister-in-law, although antagonistic to my brother, insisted on being the representative at chaperoned visits with his children when my mother visited, and even needled him about money in front of the children. My brother was broke, broken, and getting kicked while he was down.

My mother learned that my brother was not making his mortgage payments and would not be able to keep his house, so she used a chunk of her retirement savings to pay off the mortgage. She set up a payment schedule at a minimal interest rate with her son, which he then defaulted on.

This is the same woman who, when my oldest sister needed a loan for her house over a decade earlier, loaned the money at the going (high) interest rate and would not accept any delay in payment because "they needed the money in their retirement account to live on". My sister had worked very hard to keep up with her payments and was infuriated by the leniency given to the youngest child.

My brother's children are now grown and moved away. He has no real desire to stay in Utah, but has been stuck there in the house, his mounting debts a ball and chain trapping him there.

None of it seemed fair. But worst of all, the relationship between my younger brother and my oldest sister was broken. He used to take care of her son when our nephew was little and my sister was going to college. Later, when my brother had children of his own, he and my sister used to babysit for one another. They used to be tight, bound by love of the kids and a willingness to help each other out.

It is such a tragedy when sibling relationships fall apart. We hear of it all through the Bible: Cain and Abel, Jacob and Esau, Joseph and his brothers, Mary and Martha. Sometimes they reconciled, which led to great blessings; sometimes they did not.

Parents who love their children want them to get along, to know the joy of the healthy relationship, and may be heartbroken at conflict between their children. Jesus told today's parable of the wayward son to remind us that we are all children of God. Our heavenly parent wants for us to be safe and well, and to love one another, not fight.

Did you notice that Jesus did not say whether the older brother joined the celebration after all or

not? He left it open-ended, letting the Pharisees and scribes choose for themselves what they, the older brothers to sinners, would do.

God gives us the freedom to choose how we will interact with one another and with our Lord.

- † The psalmist talks about how we need to confess our sins to God, that they may be forgiven and we may live in covenantal love.
- † At Gilgal, the Israelites had chosen to renew their covenant with God, and so the covenant was fulfilled with their return to the promised land.
- † In the parable, the younger son chose when to go and when to return, and his manner when he did so. His humble return made reconciliation more likely.
- † Paul entreated the Corinthians to be reconciled to God, that they might learn Christ's viewpoint, and see everything in a new light - as a new creation.

How wonderful to see one another as beautiful and good as we were created to be! In Christ's love, we seek reconciliation. Not win/lose, with one side just giving in to the other; not lose/lose, with both sides just giving up on the relationship; but win/win, where the relationship between equals is mended and healthy.

When my mother died, we had to go through sorting out how her estate would be settled. She had included my brother's loan, with accruing interest, in the estate to be divvied up between her descendants.

My older sister wanted him evicted, the house sold for whatever we could get after all his debt liens were paid, no matter the pain he felt and that we would not get all that he owed. A lose/lose, with a broken relationship - because she had gone through a huge amount of trouble and effort dealing with my mother's decline over the years and had gotten essentially nothing for it, even though she had financial struggles too.

I had kind of figured the house would be my brother's inheritance, a larger share than the rest of us got, but not forcing him out of his house. A win/lose, with a lopsided relationship. But I also prayed for my brother to get back on his feet, to get his problems figured out so he could live healthy again.

Our middle sister actually went through all the legal stuff and calculations. With a little help, my younger brother was able to get some of the debts removed. He is motivated to fix up and sell his house now, likely to get more than he owes on it, enough to start over in an environment more to his liking. A win/win, restoring relationships and enabling healthier lives for all involved.

There I see the hand of God at work, opening our eyes to the possibilities and helping us to what is best. So this week, I entreat you to reach out to someone with whom you have a broken or wounded relationship.

With a prayer-filled approach, asking God for guidance and help, try to restore a healthy relationship between you. By the grace of God, you may be able to celebrate that what once was lost has been found, that the wretched are saved from despair.

Let us now confess in prayer to our glorious God.

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

O God of overflowing grace, you fill our every need. You nurture us as your own beloved, but we do not serve you responsibly. We are never satisfied. We seek out the comforts of this earth and do dishonor to you, the Provider of every good gift. We are liable for judgement, for our guilt is great. Spare your wrath from falling on us, O merciful God. Forgive our sin and free us to follow with joy in your righteous ways. Amen.

*<modified from: Timothy J. Crouch, OSL, Nancy B. Parks, OSL, Chris E. Visminas, Mark R. Babb, OSL, **And Also With You: Worship Resources Based on the Revised Common Lectionary Year C** (OSL Publications, 1994), 51.>*

ASSURANCE OF PARDON:

The saying is sure and worthy of full acceptance,
that Christ Jesus came into the world to save
sinners.

<1 Timothy 1:15>

In the name of Jesus Christ, you are forgiven!

In the name of Jesus Christ, you are forgiven!

Having confessed our sins and reassured by God's
grace, let us now respond with:

The Apostles' Creed, Traditional Version UMH #881

I believe in God, the Father Almighty,
maker of heaven and earth;

And in Jesus Christ his only Son, our Lord;
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, dead, and buried;
He descended into hell.

The third day he rose from the dead;
he ascended into heaven,
and sitteth at the right hand of God
the Father Almighty;
from thence he shall come to judge
the quick and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic* church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,

the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.

*universal

<Doxology>

<Offertory / Pastoral Prayer>

Let us pray:

Long-suffering God, we hear the words of the familiar parable and, at different times, see ourselves as either son.

We have received—or demanded—blessings to which we were not entitled and squandered them in self-indulgent living.

We have also looked out from our place of superiority and favor and have been indignant over your lavish dispensing of love and mercy.

As we bring our gifts this day, we do so in the humble gratitude and recognition that any and all blessings in our life come as your gift of grace.

We pray in the name of your greatest gift, Jesus our redeemer.

- Lord, please help {these members of the body of Christ whom we lift up} with Your healing touch and comfort:
 - **Gloria Dubois** - banged face/bumped head
 - **Carl Ferris** - docs cannot help leg (& Doris Genter)
 - **Pat Hathaway** - home from rehab bandaged foot (& Chuck)
 - **Lisa Prentice** - home for final recovery
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- Thanks for
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- Hold those who cannot be with us in Your loving embrace until we see them again.
 - Family far off
 - Travelers
- Lord, please help the people of Ukraine who wander displaced from their homes due to the war.
- Send Your Spirit to address world/social problems
 - end bigotry, dismantle racism, reform systems persist
 - bring world peace
- Guide our Leaders - local, state, federal, international, and especially of Your church.

All these things we pray as You taught us to pray:
<Lord's Prayer>

<Hymn "Amazing Grace" UMH #378>

<Benediction>



background picture from
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God loves you, more even than a nurturing parent.
Jesus welcomes you with His open arms that were
nailed to the cross.

The Holy Spirit calls to you, seeking to have you
home.

Wrapped in that belonging, go now into the world
that your service to the Lord
may bring others home to the family of Christ.

Amen.