

Updated version of the Prodigal Son (Togo, West Africa – change for YOUR area)

Luke 15:11-32

There was a chief who lived in a village where he owned a lot of land and goats. Now he had two sons and one day the younger son (we'll call him Patrick) came to him and asked his father to give him his share of the inheritance. The chief told his son that it was the custom to wait until the father died before each son received his share; but the young man replied that since the chief was strong and healthy he might live for many more years! Patrick wanted get out of the village and be able to enjoy his wealth while he was still young! The chief could see that his son was determined and so he finally agreed. He divided up the land and the goats, and gave Patrick his share – and Patrick immediately sold it all, took his money, and set out for the main road to **Lomé**.

He soon found a man who agreed to take him on his motorcycle into the city, where he was amazed by all the tall buildings, cars and crowds of people. His new friend took him through the market, where he found all kinds of wonderful things to buy – new clothes, a CD player, a big wristwatch, and even his OWN shiny motorcycle! He enjoyed eating all kinds of new foods and discovered a new drink called gin that made him feel warm and happy! Soon, he had lots of new friends who went everywhere with him and took him to all kinds of places where he could have fun all night long; and he began drinking and smoking and wasting his money.

But after a few weeks, Patrick woke up one morning in his hotel room and suddenly realized that his money was all gone! In fact he didn't have enough even to pay his hotel bill and so he was told to leave immediately. He went to find his friends to get some breakfast but when they heard he was out of money they went off and left him hungry! He walked around all day wondering what to do, getting hungrier and hungrier as he smelled the big pots of stew at the roadside restaurants. Finally he decided to sell his motorcycle; but even that money didn't last very long, and soon poor Patrick had to sleep **on the beach** and sell his music CDs so he could get something to eat!

He tried to find a job to earn some money but since he was from outside the city, he didn't know anyone and so no-one would give him a job. Life was hard for EVERYONE in the city and Patrick only knew about taking care of goats, so he didn't know what to do! He walked all around **Lomé** trying to find work or something to eat but without success – and then the rainy season arrived and soon his clothes were filthy with black mud, his shoes worn out and wet through, and his body aching and exhausted! He was desperate, and so when he arrived at a small pig farm on the edge of the city, he begged the farmer to let him help take care of the pigs. The farmer finally agreed to let him feed the pigs with the piles of rotting vegetables the farmer collected each day. Poor Patrick had to sleep with the pigs to stop people from stealing them (because there were many desperate and hungry people there at that time!) and he even had to eat the pigs' food – if he could find something that wasn't too rotten! Poor Patrick!

Finally one day, as he was trying to wrestle a half-rotten yam from a big pig, he fell over in the mud and suddenly realized what he was doing!!“What an idiot I am!” he said. “Here I am starving to death and fighting PIGS for food, while there are lots of villagers working for my father who have plenty to eat every day! I'll get up and go home and tell Father that I was wrong, and I'm so sorry that I wasted his money. I'm not worthy to be called his son any more but will ask him to hire me to be one of his workers.”

It took several days for Patrick to walk home as he was so weak, but finally he slowly staggered up the muddy trail to the village. The chief had been looking out for his son, and recognized him even though he was so dirty and bent down. He ran out to meet the exhausted young man on the path and joyfully hugged him, welcoming him home. But Patrick had learned his lesson and said to his father: “I've sinned against God and against you, Father. I was wrong and I'm so sorry – I'm not even worthy to be your son any more.”

But the chief called to one of his workers and told him to quickly bring some clean shoes and clothes – some good ones suitable for a special occasion. He gave Patrick one of his own rings and told the workers to prepare a big feast to celebrate. Now Patrick's older brother was working in the fields, and as he headed for home at sunset, he heard all the noise and saw everyone celebrating. He asked one of the workers what was going on and was told that Patrick had returned home. This made him very angry and he refused to go in to the celebration, so the chief came out to him. “Father, I've worked hard for you all these years and you've never given ME a special celebration! I've always obeyed you and never caused any trouble, but now Patrick comes home after wasting your money, and you give him a big party! It's not right!”

The father took him by the arm and hugged him, and said: “Son, you are always with me and everything I have is yours; but your brother was gone and it was as if he was dead; but now he's come home and has learned his lesson, so we SHOULD rejoice and celebrate! He was lost but now he is found!”