

**LENT 4C 2025**  
**Immanuel Highlands Episcopal Church**  
**Wilmington, Delaware**  
**March 30, 2025**

A father had two sons. The older, as usual, very aware of his place and duty in the family. The younger, a bit wild and adventurous, possibly because he was the one who grew up with an older brother. And, he came along after his parents learned that he wouldn't break as easily as they thought the first one might.

The youngest decides it's time to see the world. So he asks for the portion of his inheritance that might come along some day, and dad consents. The eldest stays around, helps with the family business, and prepares for roles his aging father might become unable to fulfill. But Dad is still in charge.

The younger son discovers that the world is not necessarily his oyster. He spends all his money on having fun, and then finds out what it means to have to work for a living. And what a living it is. He gets a job doing the really dirty work on a pig farm, which, by definition, is not the cleanest place around. And since they're obviously worth more to the owner of the farm, the pigs eat better than does the son.

So he finally decides it's time to go home. He understands that he's squandered any right he might have enjoyed, and by requesting his inheritance, even treated his father as if he was dead. Yet, he really has no choice but to return, offering to do menial work just to get a decent meal and some place to sleep.

A father had two sons. They don't have the same mother, as the wife cannot conceive. So she agrees to let her husband try to have a child with her servant. We know them as Abraham, Sarah, and Hagar. Hagar is the birth mother, but she surrenders her son, Ishmael, to Sarah to raise as her own child. But it doesn't work out as well as they hoped.

Eventually, with a bit of divine intervention, Sarah conceives and gives birth to Isaac. This comes after a lot of tension between Hagar and Sarah, and even an attempt to banish Hagar and Ishmael to die in the desert. I often wonder what today's Middle East might look like if Abraham had the courage to put Hagar and Sarah in the tent, and tell them they had to stay in there until they worked things out. And he wasn't going to let them turn on the air conditioning.

Nevertheless, we have what we have. But the father intervened, and the older son is the beneficiary of a similar promise made to his younger half-brother. As spiritual descendants of the younger one, we tend to forget that part of the story.

A father had two sons. The first one did okay for awhile, but then he really, really messed things up. He was given a name that means "of the earth." *Adamah*. Adam. And if you're curious about my designation, check Luke's genealogy of Jesus.

He goes all the way back to the beginning, unlike Matthew. Each generation is listed as “son of” the previous father. When it comes to Adam, Luke says he is “son of God.”

A father had two sons. The second one has a different background, a different beginning, if you want to call it that. He walks among his neighbors and friends as one with something other than his own benefit and purpose in mind. Unusual things happen in his presence. The sick are healed. Evil desires and acts cannot sustain themselves. Why, even death seems to be unable to withstand his presence. He is called *Yeshua*, a variation from Jehoshua, which means “rescuer” or “deliverer.” We use the Greek translation of the Aramaic. Jesus.

Today’s Gospel lesson, found only in Luke, is as much about the brothers as it is about the father. We also tend to forget that, because focusing on the brothers makes us a bit uneasy. It’s great to remember that dad opens the door and welcomes us back in. It’s not so great to remember that dad also expects the family to get along.

Relationships are often difficult. They were one of the first casualties of what’s called “the Fall” in the garden. They were difficult in Abraham’s time, although the two sons might have gotten along fairly well if their mothers hadn’t been at each other’s throat. In fact, we’re told that the two brothers came together to bury their father when Abraham died.

The oldest brother in today’s lesson isn’t too happy about the festivities marking his brother’s return. He makes a valid point—the father never gave him a big party, invited his friends over for a feast. Their words to each other—this son of yours/this brother of yours—gives us a window into the tension of the moment.

The party is seen as for the younger son upon his return. Yet, it’s really about the father. He could not help but rejoice that his family was back together. After all, that was the dream he had at the beginning when his children were first born.

A father had two sons. They, in turn, had descendants too numerous to count. Thanksgiving is coming, and the feast is being prepared for everyone. It’s time to stop hogging the gravy.