

**Life Can Be Sharp - March 27, 2022**  
**Central United Church, Windsor**  
**Charmain Bailey, Pastor**

**Scripture:** Luke 15: 11-31 - **The Parable of the Lost Son**

**Reflection:** There were once 2 porcupines living up north. They made a den for themselves and when winter came on, they went to sleep. As it got colder, they tried to snuggle closer together for warmth but alas, their quills pricked, and picked, and they drew apart and felt the cold again.

Each time they got too close, the quills prevented their snuggling. In the spring, they emerged cold, tired and prickly, having learned the lesson that too close for comfort, happens, if you don't learn to lay your quills down.

Like the porcupine, the prodigal son seemed to have a prickly personality and he found himself in just such a situation. Living in his father's home had become unbearable. We aren't told the reasons why but we have all likely have been in his situation, where life starts off pretty good then we begin to pick it apart and we sometimes become dissatisfied with those around us.

For those of us in families, living closely with people is generally tolerable, but even for the most loving ones among us here, sometimes living with family can be irritating if we don't learn to lay our quills down sometimes. Who hasn't fought over what tv program to watch, or fought over where an item should be placed? And do you remember your kids fighting because one of them touched the other's stuff?

How about when the relatives visit? If they only stay a few days, that's fine but any longer, and we find out they have quirks and quills that don't match ours.

Who hasn't heard shouting instead of laughter, felt discord instead of acceptance, felt shame instead of joy? We all have been in situations where what we choose to do and think, can change a volatile situation to a calmer one, and God helps us through these times if we let him.

I don't find it unusual that the Father in the prodigal's household had 2 sons who were of different minds. My brother has 2 teenage sons who are like salt and pepper. One is bubbly and outgoing and lives on the other side of the world, our other has a dry wit, an introspective wisdom and likes to stay close home and his parents.

How many of you have kids who are vastly different? Same Mom and Dad, raised in the same environment and with the same love, yet different as night and day. Such it was with the sons in our bible story. Different, and probably didn't get along with each other.

We find out early on in life that we can choose to be better or bitter. Each day, life hands us a constant barrage of circumstances where we are called to get along with those in our living spaces and our communities. It's a journey we must all take.

And God always guides us on this journey, like he did the prodigal son, to discover for ourselves the better way of life. This wayward boy didn't know he was on a spiritual journey, but he was, just as we all are. During this time of lent we need to be aware of what is important in our lives and what sometimes needs to be shed to make room so we can be a blessing to others.

We sometimes must come to the end of ourselves however, before we can hear the Holy Spirit's voice and follow Jesus' loving way back to healing and wholeness.

My friend Paul was telling me about a luncheon with some friends where the subject came up that the city of London was going to be locating a "safe needle exchange" in his friends neighbourhood. He sat amazed at the derogatory, "Not in my backyard" remarks, until he realized that in the past, he would have just nodded and remained silent in a conversation like that.

But he started thinking about the fact he himself deals with chronic pain physically and mentally daily, and that impacted his perspective on other people's pain, and their struggles.

So when his friends kept complaining about the halfway house for drug users, he couldn't stay quiet. So he responded to them, by opening up about about his own pain, and left it up to them to discern if he deserves a place to go to where his pain could be treated. And if he deserves such a treatment place, would it be okay in their neighbourhood?

On hearing another side to the story, he was hoping that his friends will look at the situation a little differently. He admitted that he was a little prickly and that his quills were raised, but once he let down his defensive attitude and just showed his friends a different side, he felt better. It just shows what could happen when we all share The Spirit of kindness instead of make the choice to raise our backs and shoot our quills.

The tension and dynamics of living in a family and community is really interesting. Within this story of the prodigal son, we find such a dynamic as the sons choose different paths, and the one son raises his quill against what he perceived to be some favouritism in the household.

The prodigal one couldn't wait to get out of his father's house. But it wasn't long before he couldn't wait to get back home!

The parable Jesus told says the young man had tried and tasted of all life's glorious offerings but, even through all the lavish living, one thing was missing.

Sitting in a pigsty, muddy, hungry, penniless and alone, he finally realized what that one thing was, that he had rejected.

Community. Love. Home is where the heart is and his heart was far from it. Far from his nurturing family, far from his haven of rest.

I have met many in my life who have been on such a journey, I know people who are currently on this difficult journey. I have taken the prodigal journey myself, and who knows, I may yet go again. We often kick against the little pricks of our Heavenly father's love and caring embrace because we can't quite believe that God loves us so completely and unconditionally.

It's hard for us to believe sometimes that there is nothing we can do that will separate us from the love of God. Much like the prodigal son experienced when he returned home. But this love is in the divine light of life itself. Jesus showed us this love and mercy throughout his ministry.

Each Sunday, we light the Christ candle to remind us that we all have that divine nature of Christ living within us and can tap into the amazing love of our Creator anytime, whether we are in the valley or on the mountaintops. Whether we choose to stay home or go abroad as our parable suggests.

Let's not forget the older brother though, who was cherished always by his family just the way he was. Though he struggled with envy and jealousy, and he was like a porcupine with his quills flared, that his dad was making so much of his wayward brother's return, yet the Father lovingly didn't hold this against him.

He simply took him aside and gently reminded him "I love you. All I have is yours, it always has been, you can celebrate anytime, you have always been cherished, you belong. Rejoice with me that your brother who has been lost is now found!"

The Eternal Infinite One who give us our very breathe, portrays this beautiful Love dance between himself and all creation. God has no labels. We are all God's children. The Prodigal son's dad showed this in his dealings with both of his son's: the one who ran and the one who stayed by his side.

You know, porcupines have the cutest faces and the softest underbellies, but their quills can do great damage. God knew these critters would struggle with picking and pricking each other so he gave them a way to lay their quills down when another

porcupine comes near. That way they can warm each other through the cold winters of their lives.

Are you going through a cold winter or do you know someone who is? During this time of reflection in lent, let's choose to lay down our quills and get close to the Spirit's warm embrace and to those around us that may need a gentle reminder that everyone is cherished by the Father who lights our soul with his love.

And so, God speaks to us, saying "All I have is yours, it always has been, you can celebrate anytime, you have always been cherished, you belong. Rejoice with me, you have never been lost, come and find yourself in me!" All of us prodigal ones, all of us prickly ones, are called to return to our loving father. Thanks be to God, Amen.

**Prayers:** Loving God may we be found and may we find a place called home a place where faith holds us and grace renews us where forgiveness longs for us to be who you will us to be.

May we find a place called home where we are accepted as we are

- where we are taken in and loved unconditionally.
- A place called home where we belong and our souls fit and
- our questions are allowed and our anger is heard and
- our needs are recognised and
- our pain is held and our names are known.

And may this be that place,

O God, this community, this group of travellers and doubters and companions. These people of prodigals are prickly ones.

This home where your place is our place and place isn't a building! but a way of being together in relationship, held together by love. Love for you, love for each other, love for our shut ins..... love for those who we are thinking of, who are suffering in one way or another....

Loving God!

Homecoming God!

May we make this a home to all who still yet seek.

A place of grace-filled sanctuary and gracious welcome.

So be it, in Jesus name.