



## **“The Last Supper: Conversations that Led to the Cross”** By Dr. Will Willimon

**Session 3: Feasting with the Found**  
March 8, 2026 4:00 PM

**Thank you for joining us again for this Lenten journey with Jesus. Our session today deals with some of Jesus’s most beloved – and most disturbing – stories.**

### **INTRODUCTION**

**Imagine our church’s biggest donor announcing they’re leaving all their money to the church when they die. But then their estranged child – who hasn’t been to church in twenty years and has a reputation for wild living – shows up on their deathbed, and the donor decided to throw a huge welcome-home party instead.**

- How would our congregation react?
- Who would you identify with in that scenario?

#### **The context for Luke 15:1-2:**

**“All the tax collectors and sinners were gathering around Jesus to listen to him. The Pharisees and legal experts were grumbling, saying, “This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.”**

- The religious leaders don’t criticize Jesus’s theology – they grumble about his dinner companions. Why does this matter?
- When has our church grumbled about who Jesus welcomes?

## **OPENING PRAYER**

*Searching God, you leave the safety of the ninety-nine to find the one, tear up the house looking for what's lost, and throw expensive parties for children who don't deserve them. Help us today to see ourselves honestly in these stories – sometimes lost, sometimes found, sometimes grateful, sometimes grumbling. Open our hearts to the scandalous mathematics of your grace and our calling to join your search-and-rescue mission. Amen.*

## **SESSION 3 VIDEO – “The Wasteful Father”**

Thoughts to consider as we watch the video...

- How does Willimon's interpretation challenge your previous understanding of these familiar parables?
- What did you think about his emphasis on God's "horrible home economics"?

## **THE RECKLESS SHEPHERD**

***Scripture Focus – Luke 15:3-7***

**“Which one of you wouldn't do that? People are rolling in the aisles with laughter: “Tell us another one, Jesus, they're a hoot!”**

- What is absurd about this shepherd's behavior?
- Willimon says this sloppy Sower has “switched jobs” to become a reckless shepherd. What does this tell us about God's character?

**These are not stories about us. These are stories about God. - Willimon**

- How does knowing this is about God change how you hear the story?
- What does it mean that God practices “scandalous shepherding”?

## **THE HOUSE-WRECKING WOMAN**

***Scripture Focus – Luke 15:8-10***

**Which one of you wouldn't do that? Nobody would act like that. None of us would engage in such horrible home economics...much less throw an expensive party for a trifle like one recovered sheep or a single small coin retrieved. - Willimon**

- Why does this woman's behavior seem so excessive for finding one coin?
- What does this story reveal about what God considers valuable?

**God's kingdom accounting is different from what counts in our kingdom.  
- Willimon**

- How does God's accounting differ from the world's?
- When have you seen the church value what the world considers worthless?

### **THE MOST WONDERFUL WORD**

**"Though I was a child when I heard it, I still remember our pastor's sermon, "The Most Wonderful, Comforting Word in the Bible." The word? It's prominent in these two stories - until." - Willimon**

- When does God call off the search for the lost?
- How does this word *until* change your understanding of God's persistence?

**When a person blasphemes...When someone dies without having accepted God's invitation? It a miscreant commits an act of irredeemably horrible...Hitler? Stalin? - Willimon**

- What are the limits of God's searching love?
- How do we balance God's persistence with human responsibility?

### **THE PRODIGAL FATHER**

***Scripture Reading - Luke 15:11-32***

**I know you're accustomed to calling this the prodigal (wasteful, extravagant, loose living) son, but will you agree that the most interesting character in the story is the prodigally gracious, welcoming father? - Willimon**

**The father doesn't give a rip for contrite speeches. "Save the Repentance Drama" for your application to Law School. You wanted a party? I'll show you a party."**

- Why doesn't the father want to hear the son's carefully prepared apology?
- What does the father's interruption teach us about grace?

**What we wanted was for the father to receive the boy back home...Then there's supposed to be an unsmiling lecture...What we get is the father's extravagant (might I say, wasteful, prodigal) unconditional party -**  
**Willimon**

- Why are we more comfortable with lectures than parties?
- When has God surprised you with celebration instead of scolding?

## **MEETING THE OLDER BROTHER**

***Scripture Reading – Luke 15:25-32***

**The older brother's grumbling reminds us of the griping of the Pharisees that occasioned this parable. We got here first. We've sat through years of boring Bible studies and engaged in Lenten self-denial practices... -**  
**Willimon**

- When do you identify with the older brother?
- What makes his complaints seem reasonable?
- When has our church struggled with welcoming "those people"?

**I have met the grumbling, stuffy older brother: me." - Willimon**

- How can church members avoid becoming "older brothers"?
- What's the difference between faithful church membership and older brother syndrome?

## **THE CHURCH AS SEARCH PARTY**

**Our duty as citizens of God's kingdom? Search. Find. Forgive. Celebrate. Repeat. – Willimon**

- How is our church *joining* Jesus in seeking out, searching for, and saving the lost?
- Where might Jesus already be at work in your community that you haven't noticed?

**The evangelistic, missional question is, "Will we?" - Willimon**

## **CLOSING**

**At the end of Luke's Gospel the risen Christ, teller of these tales, commissions his followers, all of them, to be evangelists. It's our job to tell "all nations" the good news of a feast that begins with "a change of heart and life for the forgiveness of sins."...He calls us "witnesses", making each of us into servants who deliver the Master's invitation to the feast, sowers who sling the seed, shepherds who seek a lost sheep, women who search for a lost coin, those who open the door and say, "This feast is for you." - Willimon**

This Week's Challenge...

- Remind yourself daily that you are a part of God's search-and-rescue operation.
- Look for one opportunity to be part of finding someone who feels lost.
- Practice celebrating rather than lecturing when you encounter grace in action.
- Be honest, do you think you would be among the celebrators, or would you be a grumbler outside the party for the homecoming of the prodigal son?
- How is FBC Elon joining with Jesus in seeking out, searching for, and saving the lost?

**CLOSING PRAYER**

Prodigally gracious God, you practice horrible home economics, leaving the ninety-nine to search for the one, throwing expensive parties for children who squander your gifts. Help us trust your wasteful love even when it offends our sense of fairness. Make us partners in your search-and-rescue mission, willing to tear up our comfort zones to find the lost. Give us the father’s eyes that watch the horizon for returning children, and save us from the older brother’s spirit that would rather be right than celebrate. As we continue toward your table, help us remember that we are there only because you searched for us first. Amen.

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**Session 4: Crumbs from the Table**

**Sunday, March 15 5:00 PM**

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