

## The Constancy of God's Love

The parables that Jesus tells are a joy, but we are constantly trying to allegorise them and bolt onto them meanings and conditions which don't apply; even the gospel writers themselves, in the case of the parable of the sower, have fallen into the trap. The whole point of a parable is that it shouldn't need an explanation; its impact has to be focused on the listener and the effect it has on him or her. So what are we to make of today's three offerings? What do they say to you and me as we ponder our own circumstances and situations?

When we examine ourselves and ask ourselves what is the most important thing that matter to us, I've no doubt that top of the list will come "relationships" both the human and the divine. However all our human relationships commence with and are determined by our own individuality, and they are thus susceptible to the fickleness that circumstances can throw up. Our relationship with God is different, since God remains the constant factor in the relationship, the one who is not subject to such matters, and I think that these three parables express this understanding by looking to explore our relationship with God both from God's point of view as well as from ours.

The parable of the lost sheep, the parable of the lost coin and the parable of the two sons demonstrate something quite profound about God's relationship with us. God loves us and that love of God for us, is all pervading. God will never stop loving us and to make this point, Jesus, in the first two parables, expresses it in a way which seems from a human viewpoint almost fool hardy (the shepherd leaving the ninety nine to search for the one) and irrational (the widow expending so much energy for a small coin). But God's love is neither fool hardy nor irrational, for God's love is constant, whilst our love can sometimes be very grudging and this is the point which is made most powerfully in the parable which follows, namely that of the two sons, and it is important that we listen carefully to the whole story and notice what is happening. The younger son goes off to enjoy the high life and in doing so ruptures his relationship with his father. The elder brother remains; a brooding presence in the household, his relationship with his father seemingly irreparably damaged. Eventually the younger son returns and is greeted with joy and compassion by his father but not by his elder brother who now resents him and his father over what has happened. But now we hear the most amazing sentence in the story. The father turns to his elder son and says: *My son, you are with me always and all I have is yours.* Notwithstanding all that has gone wrong between the elder son and his father, his father is still able to say those words. What do they tell us?

Jesus has told us that our relationship with God is like that of a loving father. He calls us to *be compassionate as your father is compassionate*. God's love is constant and total no matter what our circumstances or situations. He is with us no matter how far distant we may move away from him. He searches and cares for us even when we don't realise it, and he is ready and open to embrace us with his compassion whenever we choose to come back to him.

In these three parables the constancy of God's love is the abiding reality which enables our human relationships, flawed and damaged as they sometimes are, the possibility and potential to be restored. In other words, this love offers us the hope that what was dead can come to life.