

SERMON: Ro 5:1-11 - THE LOST DAUGHTER

She didn't recognise him at first. But when their eyes met she knew for sure, and to her surprise he was smiling at her. It took her back to the day ten years ago when she last saw her brother Robert. He wasn't smiling then.

And Robert well remembered that day too. Helen was only eighteen at the time. Only eighteen but so grown up, so independent, so full of life. Robert and his father farmed in upper Donside. Things were very easy between them and they got on really well together. Robert loved the farm and had never known any other way of life. But it was different for Helen. Robert could understand now how frustrated Helen must have felt at times. All that talent and she couldn't use it; couldn't make the most of it, not up here in this part of the world. Robert had been lucky, he loved the farm, loved the life here, but Helen, what was there for her in a place like this?

To the passing tourist on the glen road looking across the fields at the spread of cattle sheds and implements lying around, things seemed normal. The folk in the village however, knew that all was not as cosy and comfortable as it appeared on the surface. They knew only a little of what had happened many years ago, only what had leaked out in unguarded moments from Robert or his father and mother. They knew because neither Robert nor his parents could hide their sadness, not all the time anyway.

The teacher at the academy said she had a wander-lust in her soul. Well that was true enough. He well remembered that day when she waved her air ticket for California proudly around the kitchen. Her parents had tried to understand, tried to reason with her, but she was just not prepared to make a compromise, not prepared to spend a few years at college before travelling the world. And then she had walked out in a huff. Robert thought she would be back when things cooled down a bit but when she didn't come in that evening they began to get worried. Their father said she had probably gone to stay with a friend. He would give it twenty-four hours and if she still hadn't shown up he would inform the police. Well, it was nearly time up when the phone rang. It was Helen, at the airport, saying she was going, like it or not. And that was the last they heard from her for ten years. They had tried to find her but she had vanished without trace.

Robert knew that if Helen could see the devastating effect that her sudden departure had had on their parents then she would come home tomorrow. He hated to see his parents so heartbroken. His mother had lost all her joy in life and shied away from company in case she became too emotional. His father rarely smiled. He had lost his only daughter, the one that used to sit on his knee as he read her a bedtime story. Nothing would ever be right again until Helen was back.

That idea, somehow bringing back Helen, had preoccupied Robert for much of the last ten years. He would convince her that she need not be afraid of losing anything if she came back, make her see that she would still be free, still be herself if she would only make things up and heal the rift with her parents. He knew he was the only one who could bring his sister back. And he would, he was sure of it.

JESUS

That is what Jesus has done for us

The bible tells us that people are separated from God
Every time we think or do or say something that is wrong,
it separates us from God
Every time we do **not** think or do or say something good,
it spoils the loving relationship he wants to have with us

But God loves us so much that he longs for us to come to him and be his friend.
He has taken the initiative by sending Jesus to seek and to save the lost.
Jesus does not wait for us to clean up our act first – to be good enough -
That would be impossible

Ro 5:8-10 “God has shown us how much he loves us – it was while we were still sinners that Christ died for us! By his blood we are now put right with God because God has made us his friends through the death of his Son”

Ro 5:1,2 “Now that we have been put right with God through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. He has brought us by faith into this experience of God’s grace, in which we now live.”

THE LOST DAUGHTER (conc)

The phone rang. It was one of Helen's old school friends. She said she had seen Helen working in a shop in Glasgow. Robert knew that this was the chance he had been waiting for. His father and mother hardly dared to hope that Robert would find her. And even if he did, would she come back? But Robert said it was worth a try and so they gave him every encouragement. First, he found out which shop she had been seen in and then he set off for Glasgow.

The city was all new to Robert and he had to ask several people before he found the right street for the shop. It was a big chain store, the type where you get lost and can't find your way out. Where to start? That was the problem. Robert patiently went around the store, asking if someone called Helen worked in there and showing a picture of her. Eventually he found someone who recognized her. Yes she did work there. The woman pointed across the store to where Helen was serving a customer.

Robert went over and stood by the counter. When Helen finished serving she looked up at him, thinking he was a customer. Gradually a look of recognition, then surprise came over her face. And Robert knew that things were going to turn out alright. Her eyes had none of the defiant look of ten years ago. A softness had replaced all that. There seemed to be an understanding between them, as if she had hoped for this moment as much as he had.

After work they met in a café round the corner. Helen told Robert about her life of the past ten years. Told him of the initial excitement of leaving home but then later of the bitter disappointments she had experienced, of things not working out and of her not wanting to go home and admit defeat. She thought that if she came back to Scotland she might be happy. But she wasn't happy. She knew that she really needed to make peace with her parents before she could know peace in her own heart. But how could she be reconciled to them after all this time?

Robert suggested that she could visit just for a day and see how things went. She was hesitant at first, unsure of the welcome she would get from her parents. But Robert assured her parents were longing to see her again and would welcome her with open arms.

And so they went back together.

As Robert and Helen drove up the track, Helen was shaking with nerves. What would happen? What would be said? How would she cope?

All her fears came to nothing. There were her mum and dad waiting at the door. And instead of the anger she had expected she saw love in their eyes. It was hard to believe, after the way she had treated them. She started off by telling them how sorry she was, and they assured her that all was forgiven and that she was to put it behind her now. She felt as if a huge weight had been taken off her shoulders. She wouldn't ever be so foolish again. She might even apply for a job nearer to home. Now that she had a family again she didn't want to lose them.

And her parents were so happy. They phoned all their neighbours and friends and told them to come round that night to celebrate with them. Their daughter Helen had returned. They thought she might be dead but she was alive, she was lost but now she was found.

CONC

Jesus became a human being, our brother, to come and find us and bring us back to God our loving Heavenly Father

The communion that we share today is a reminder of Christ's love for us – a love that took him to the cross where he gave his life so that we might be forgiven and experience the loving relationship that our Father longs to have with us

It is also a symbol of the celebration and joy which we can experience in the Father's presence

So let us come into God's presence today with thankful hearts, and experience his love for ourselves