

Tables Shared: Reconciliation Rev. Jonathan Murray - September 13, 2026

Rev. Murray concludes the *Tables Shared* series by bringing us to what he calls “the hardest table of all - the **table of reconciliation**.” Using Luke 15:25–32, he reframes the familiar Prodigal Son story as *the story of two lost sons*. The younger son is lost in a distant country; the older son is lost in his own backyard. The father goes out to both, extending grace, restoring relationships, and inviting them to sit at the table. Yet Jesus leaves the story unfinished - whether the older brother enters is never revealed - because the real question is directed at us: **Will we come inside? Will we choose reconciliation?**

Rev. Murray emphasizes that reconciliation is not sentimental or simplistic. It requires **truth, repentance, and changed behavior**. He illustrates this through Joseph’s reconciliation with his brothers in Genesis. Joseph does not deny the harm done - “Joseph doesn’t pretend that the past didn’t happen... But he refuses to let what happened have the final word.” Instead, he tests his brothers, sees their transformed character, and chooses a future beyond the wounds of the past.

The sermon introduces **shalom**, the Hebrew vision of wholeness, completeness, and restored well-being. Reconciliation is participation in God’s work of putting fractured things back together - like *Kintsugi*, the Japanese art of repairing pottery with gold, where the cracks become part of the beauty. God makes the first move toward humanity in Christ, and Paul teaches that we are now entrusted with the **ministry of reconciliation**. Grace received must become grace extended.

Rev. Murray names the challenge honestly: reconciliation becomes difficult when the person at the table is someone who hurt us, disappointed us, betrayed us, or made our lives miserable. The father’s gentle correction - changing “this son of yours” to “this brother of yours” - reveals God’s desire not only to reconcile individuals to God but also to reconcile us to one another. Still, he makes clear that reconciliation is **not always possible**; it cannot be forced, and it must never require someone to return to ongoing harm. Peace without justice is not shalom.

Healthy reconciliation sounds like families finally telling the truth, marriages learning to listen, friendships restored through genuine apology, and churches choosing relationship over uniformity. Unhealthy reconciliation sounds like demands without accountability, conversations aimed at winning, or apologies that avoid responsibility. Reconciliation must be cultivated - like a garden - and practiced as a rhythm of life.

Jesus keeps setting tables, cultivating welcome, generosity, grace, and now reconciliation. Everywhere we go - families, neighborhoods, workplaces, disagreements - we carry God’s

reconciling presence. A table is never just a table; it is a place where wounds can heal, differences can coexist, and God's shalom can take root.

The final question remains open, just as Jesus leaves the story open: **Will we come to the table? Will we allow God to reconcile us, tell the truth, seek justice, forgive where possible, and pull up another chair?**

Transcript

Listen now for the reading of the gospel as it comes from Luke chapter 15 beginning at verse 25. Now the father's elder son was in the field. And as he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. He called one of the slaves and asked what was going on. He replied, your brother has come home. And your father has killed the fatted calf because he got him back safe and sound. Then the elder brother became angry and refused to go in. His father came out and began to plead with him. But he answered his father, listen, for all these years I have been working like a slave for you. I have never disobeyed your command, yet you have never given me even a young goat so that I might celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours came back, who has devoured your assets with prostitutes, you killed the fatted calf for him. Then the father said to him, Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life. He was lost and has been found. Says the word of the Lord. God is still speaking. Please be seated. Over the last four weeks, we've been joining Jesus at tables. And I trust you, like me, I've realized and remembered the power of gathering at a table. We've read about how Jesus gathered people around tables, people who probably would not have chosen to sit together. And yet Jesus kept setting the table. Because Jesus understands something that we often forget. Who sits at the table matters. And perhaps even more importantly, who we are willing to sit beside. Well, today we come to the final table in our series. Now there are other tables in the Gospels, but even in the Gospel according to Luke, that we could explore, and we might on some future Sunday. But today's table, this table that we just read is perhaps the hardest of all. It's the table of reconciliation. So Luke 15, Luke tells a story about a father who has two sons. And this story is usually identified by the title, The Prodigal Son. That title describes how it has traditionally been interpreted and preached. I dislike giving titles to Bible stories. because it limits how we hear them. However, if we are to give it a title for today, I would call it the story of the two lost sons. The story gets the title Prodigal Son because one of the sons, the younger son, asks for his inheritance and then leaves. He takes the money and he goes far away and he wastes it. He squanders it. and he hits bottom, probably as low as anyone could go. So low that he was willing to eat what he was feeding to the pigs. That's pretty low. He eventually comes home. The father has been watching. The father sees him coming, the father runs to him, the father embraces him and the father restores him. And then the father throws and holds a celebration. There's music, there's food, and there's a table. But one person isn't there. The older brother. And when the older brother discovers that his father has welcomed home his younger brother, he becomes angry. And he remains outside. He refuses to go in. The father goes outside. He tries to persuade. He tries to plead with him to come in. The father has two lost sons. The

younger son was lost in a country far away. The older son was lost in the father's backyard. The father goes after both of them. The story ends without telling us whether the older brother takes a seat at the table. And that is intentional. Jesus leaves the story unfinished because the question isn't, what did the older brother do? The question is, what will we do? Will we come inside? Will we sit at the table? Will we be reconciled to those who have hurt us or been hurt by us? Our Genesis story and our Genesis reading gives us another story of reconciliation. Now for those who are less familiar with the Joseph saga, Joseph's brothers betrayed him. They threw him into a pit. They sold him into slavery. They lied to their father saying a wild animal had killed him. Not expecting to ever have to come face to face with their brother again. Joseph has every reason to hold on to his anger. He has every reason to seek revenge. He has every reason to say, you made your choices, now you lie in it. You live to live into that. But when his brothers come before Joseph years later, they don't recognize him. They see an Egyptian. Joseph plays tricks on them. He begins to test them, to learn who they are now, to discover their character. to learn to what extent they will go to protect themselves at the expense of someone else. What Joseph sees impresses him. So Joseph reveals who he is. And Genesis says something very remarkable here. Joseph doesn't pretend that the past didn't happen. He doesn't say, it wasn't really that bad. He doesn't deny the pain and the hurt. But Joseph weeps. Because of God's work in his life, Joseph becomes capable of imagining a future that is beyond the wounds of the past. And he tells his brothers, don't feel badly. Don't blame yourselves for selling me. That's forgiveness. And that's forgiveness that leads to reconciliation. Joseph doesn't forget. He doesn't pretend it didn't happen. He does not excuse it. But he refuses to let what happened have the final word. The Hebrew language gives us a very important word here, shalom. Have you heard that word before? What does it mean? Peace. Yes. And it's more than just the absence of conflict. It's the sense of wholeness, completeness, well-being. It's the embodiment of things being put back together. There's an art of repairing pottery with gold that the Japanese practice, kintsugi. Have you heard of it, seen it? treats breakage as part of the life story of an item rather than something to hide or discard. And it repairs those cracks with gold to make the repaired piece even more unique and more beautiful. Similarly, when God creates, God creates toward shalom, wholeness. When God calls God's people, it is toward shalom, completeness. And when God reconciles humanity, God is restoring what sin fractured. Reconciliation is about participating in God's work of making things whole. In 2 Corinthians chapter 5, Paul talks about reconciliation, saying that God in Christ was reconciling the world to himself. Paul uses a Greek word that I won't even try to pronounce but it's a word for reconciliation that carries this desire to restore trust, to bring about a changed relationship. God reconciled the world through Christ. God made the first move. The Christian story doesn't begin with us reaching toward God. It begins with God reaching toward humanity. God moves toward us. God crosses the distance. God makes that first

move. God doesn't wait for us to get everything right. God doesn't wait for to become worthy. We chose life apart from God, and yet God moves toward us. And then Paul says, we are ambassadors for God. God has given us the ministry of reconciliation. All of that, what that means is the reconciliation that we receive from God becomes the reconciliation we are to practice with one another. We reconcile with others because we have already received grace. And that brings us back to the older brother. Because the older brother has a problem. He has stayed and worked for his father, done everything the father has asked of him, and he believes that he has earned a celebration. And he says, but now this son of yours comes home after wasting everything and you reward him by throwing a party? I can't decide whether the older brother doesn't understand grace or if he understands it perfectly well and doesn't think his brother deserves it. But isn't that sometimes where reconciliation is most difficult? Because we believe in forgiveness until it's about someone who hurt us. We believe that everyone has a place, belongs at God's table until the person sitting across from us is someone we just can't get along with. Someone who's disappointed us, someone who has betrayed us, someone who is cruel, someone who left the church, or someone who stayed and made our lives miserable. Someone who hurts someone we love. Then the table isn't big enough for them. There's not a seat for them. But I'm grateful for the father's words to the older brother because he doesn't say that what happened didn't matter. He doesn't say forget about it. He doesn't say you have no right to be upset. He says you are always with me. All that I have is yours. And we had to celebrate. We had to celebrate because this brother of yours was lost and has been found, was dead and has come back to life. Did you notice how the father changed the words that the older brother uses? Because the older brother said, this son of yours. And the father says, this brother of yours. The father is trying to restore the relationship between himself and the younger brother, himself and the older brother, as well as the relationship between the two brothers. I need to make something very clear. Reconciliation is not always possible. Real harm has been done by telling people they must reconcile with someone who continues to hurt, continues to manipulate, abuse, or threaten. That is not what Jesus is teaching. Reconciliation requires truth. It requires repentance. It requires changed behavior. Sometimes reconciliation means sitting at the same table again. And sometimes it means forgiving while maintaining distance. The most faithful act of reconciliation is to tell the truth about what happened. Because peace without justice is not shalom. Silence without truth is not reconciliation. And pretending that nothing happened does not allow healing to progress. We see this in Joseph's story. He tests his brother. He watches what they do. Joseph discovers reconciliation is possible because the brother's character, their actions, their behavior has changed. Judah, in particular, go back and read chapter 44, is willing to sacrifice himself for Benjamin. Judah is the one who first proposed the idea of selling Joseph into slavery. And Judah, along with the brothers, now demonstrate a willingness to

protect one another. That is changed behavior. And that makes reconciliation possible. And that's important for us. We are to forgive. We are a people of forgiveness. We are to offer it freely. But reconciliation is mutual, relational. It requires movement from everyone involved. And when reconciliation goes well, it sounds like families who have spent years apart finally sitting down and saying, tell me what happened from your perspective. It looks like a marriage who has survived deep wounds because someone finally stops defending themselves and truly listens. Friendships restore because someone's willing to say, I'm sorry. Not, I'm sorry you felt that way, but I was wrong and I'm sorry. Churches who have moved through painful disagreements because people choose relationships over agreement. Unity is not uniformity. And sometimes reconciliation begins with something incredibly simple, like pulling a chair up to a table together. But there are times that reconciliation doesn't go well, and it sounds like when people come to the table determined to win. When people want reconciliation without accountability. When we want someone to say, I'm sorry, but are not willing to say I apologize. When we enter the conversation already preparing our response rather than listening. When we want reconciliation on our terms. Because reconciliation cannot be forced or coerced. It has to be cultivated like a garden. And that brings us back to where we began. Jesus keeps setting tables. And at every table, Jesus is working to cultivate something in us. At a table of outsiders, Jesus cultivates welcome. At a table of hungry people, Jesus cultivates generosity. At the table of sinners and religious people, Jesus cultivates grace. And grace received must be grace extended. Because we cannot spend our lives receiving God's reconciliation and refuse to become people who practice reconciliation. Reconciliation is not one grand heroic act. It is a way of living. It becomes a rhythm. It's a willingness to keep making room. Which means that everywhere we go, we carry something of God's reconciling presence with us. Into our families, into our neighborhoods, into this church, into our workplaces, into disagreement, into the places where relationships are fractured. We carry God's invitation, come to the table, not because everyone agrees, not because everyone has behaved perfectly, not because the past doesn't matter, but because God's love is bigger, greater than our divisions. Jesus doesn't tell us whether the older brother enters the house. He leaves the door open. Jesus leaves a place at the table. But it's our question to answer. Will we go inside? Will we allow God to reconcile us? Will we tell the truth about what has happened? Will we forgive where it's possible? Will we seek justice as it's needed? Will we pull up another chair? In about 1/2 an hour, we're gonna do something incredibly ordinary. We're gonna sit and have lunch together. We're gonna share tables. We're gonna talk. We're going to listen. It's a simple thing. But Jesus keeps telling us that a table is rarely just a table. It's a place where strangers become neighbors, where stories are shared, where wounds can begin to heal, where forgiveness can be spoken, where differences can coexist, where God's shalom begins to take root. So as we gather around

those tables today, we need to ask, what would God's reconciliation look like through me?
Because a table is set. Grace has already been extended. Will we come to the table? Amen.