

## “Simply Scandalous”

Rev. Ken McGarry at The First Congregational Church in Stoneham, Massachusetts  
March 27, 2022 – Fourth Sunday in Lent  
Joshua 5:9-12; Luke 15:1-3, 11b-32

Simply scandalous! Don't they know what time it is (tapping watch)? It is so late, and they're making such a racket. Why, just listen to that noise as they go about their dancing and feasting on fatted calf over there (motioning to northern wall of sanctuary)! Isn't there a noise ordinance in this town? At what point do we call the police to break up this wild party, which, I should say, has been going on since this morning?! And now, even at this late hour, they're still not slowing down!

It's simply scandalous, if you ask me, not just because of the noise, but because of the reason for their party. Haven't you heard? Well, I'm not a nosy neighbor or anything, but I do pay attention to what happens in our neighborhood here, and I know a thing or two about this party next door. I'm not one to gossip, but let me tell you the scandalous, sordid story about our neighbor Ellie and her kids Bubba and Billie.

Again, I'm not a nosy neighbor, but I heard that Ellie's younger child Bubba, not too long ago, asked for his share of the Ellie's estate. That's right! Even while Ellie was still living, he had the gall to ask for the part of the estate that would go to him when she died! Can you believe that? Bubba pretty much told his mom, who has always been kind and loving, that he wished for her to die so that he could get her money!

Well, what makes this even more scandalous is that Ellie actually gave her money to this punk kid Bubba! Now as Ellie's younger child, he only got a third of the estate, but it still amounted to a great deal, after all, it was wealth that Ellie had built up over her long life of hard work. But she gave it freely to her bratty son Bubba.

Well, I heard that Bubba went away and wasted all that money on wild living in a foreign land! Bubba wasted all of it--every single penny! Oh, it gets worse! Bubba had nothing after he had spent all of Ellie's hard-earned money, so he had to take a job, and the only job he could find was to work out in a field with pigs--filthy, dirty, unclean, *unkosher* pigs. Yuck! The word on the street is that Bubba

was so broke and hungry, he wanted to eat the pigs' food (shaking head in disgust), but no one would give him anything at all to eat. He was worse off -- and less important -- than someone's muddy pig.

Well, let me tell you about something that's *even more* scandalous. Here's what I saw just this morning. Ellie was standing out on the front porch of her house, just as she did every morning since Bubba left home. She was out there looking out toward the horizon, looking and weeping and praying. I think she's been out there hoping that her son Bubba would return. Well, this morning, that's exactly what happened. Bubba came home. And Ellie took off running to greet him. She ran out in the field in the most undignified way, wearing just her bathrobe. It's simply scandalous, I say. And when she came to Bubba, she embraced that filthy brat, who probably still smelled like a pig -- he sure looked worse than one. Can you believe that? She should have punished him; she should have given him a whipping or some other well-deserved, harsh punishment, but she didn't. She embraced him. It's scandalous, I tell you.

Well, the story only gets worse. I saw one of Ellie's workers join them out in the field, and the worker came out with *the best* robe! I've never seen anyone over there wear something as fancy as what was given to Bubba. And they put a family ring on his finger. Can you believe that? This bratty kid Bubba comes home after wasting Ellie's money, and then she gives him best robe and a family ring? That kid should have been kicked in the you-know-where or told to turn around and go to you-know-where; But no, Ellie, instead, crying again, but with what I assume were tears of joy, embraced and welcomed him back as a beloved child. It's a scandal!

Well, what even more scandalous is that Ellie decided to throw a party for this wayward, wasteful child. And speaking of wasteful -- this was not just some little party that Ellie threw. As you can hear, it's quite an extravagant shindig. Ellie invited me over, too -- along with the rest of the town -- and told me that they weren't just having the standard cookout fair, but were celebrating with the best Wagyu beef burgers and other fancy foods. Now, I love a good, expensive Wagyu burger, but there's no way I want to be a part of this scandalous mess -- this party for a kid who wished Ellie dead and then took and wasted so much of her property. I'm staying away!

And I know I'm not the only one staying away from the party. You see over there (motioning to the south wall of the sanctuary)? Billie, Ellie's older child, is still working away out in the fields, even at this late hour. They've been working back there all day and all night, just like Billie's been working diligently all day and night every year as long as I've known them, faithfully toiling away.

I'm not much of a nosy neighbor, but I've watched Billie over the years -- always being a good kid, taking care of things at home, taking care of Ellie, taking care of the farm. And then when Bubba left, Billie took on his chores, too. What a good kid! Billie's the one who should be getting a party, am I right? It's simply a scandal that good Billie doesn't get a party but bad Bubba does! It doesn't seem fair to me at all, and I certainly don't blame Billie one bit for staying out in the field instead of going inside and enjoying that most improper party.

You know, I thought I knew Ellie pretty well. I thought Ellie had more common sense. I thought that she did what was fair, giving people what they deserved. But I guess I was all wrong about Ellie. Ellie doesn't seem to be fair at all. And she seems a bit foolish, letting her children do what they want to do and go where they want to go, even if they choose to go far, far away from home, where they might not live very differently than how she taught them to live; and she gives them her riches, even for a wayward journey, knowing that they might waste it all. And she seems a bit odd, hoping and looking for her children to return home.

It seems pretty silly to me that when Ellie's children come back home, she doesn't ask questions, she doesn't cast blame, she doesn't hand out well-deserved punishment; instead, she rejoices, welcomes them with open arms, and freely gives them even more of her riches. And then she throws a wild and extravagant party -- like this one that's keeping me up JUST WON'T STOP! None of this seems fair to me. It just doesn't seem right. It's scandalous, I tell you.

Well, I think I've had enough outrage for one night. Maybe I'll stick some cotton balls in my ears and try to get some sleep...Wait a minute...What's that in your hand (motioning to congregation)? Is that an invitation to the party? *You're* not on your way over there, are you? *Are you?*