

Season of LENT

Prayer

Collect of the Day

Almighty God, our heavenly Father, Your mercies are new every morning; and though we deserve only punishment, You receive us as Your children and provide for all our needs of body and soul. Grant that we may heartily acknowledge Your merciful goodness, give thanks for all Your benefits, and serve You in willing obedience; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Scripture Readings

Psalm 32
(antiphon v. 11)
Isaiah 12:1-6
2 Corinthians 5:16-21
Luke 15:1-3, 11-32

Hymns

Hymn of the Day – 571 or 972
Other Hymns – 686 (OT), 568 (E),
569 (G), 915 (G, E), 543

In peace, let us pray to the Lord: Lord, have mercy.

For contrition over our sin and joy in confession and absolution, that God would give us a proper knowledge of the evil we have done and deal with us according to His steadfast love, let us pray to the Lord: Lord, have mercy.

For confidence in Christ alone, that God our Father would call us to repentance whenever we wander into sin or believe we have earned a place in His household by our works, and that He would return us to the certainty that we are found alive in His Son, let us pray to the Lord: Lord, have mercy.

For pastors, teachers, musicians and all church workers, that God would bless their daily labours to make known His deeds among the peoples, let us pray to the Lord: Lord, have mercy.

For hearts ever grateful that, in Holy Baptism, the Lord washes us thoroughly from our iniquity and cleanses us from our sin, let us pray to the Lord: Lord, have mercy.

For our nation and all in authority, that God would make them prudent and wise so that we might live in peace and freely make known His message of reconciliation, let us pray to the Lord: Lord, have mercy.

For those in need of mercy, healing and help, [including _____,] that the Lord would deliver them according to His will and remind them of the day when sorrow and sickness will be no more, let us pray to the Lord: Lord, have mercy.

For all who partake of Holy Communion today, that they may come penitently prepared to receive the body and blood of the Holy One who dwells in their midst, let us pray to the Lord: Lord, have mercy.

That the people of God in their various callings would rejoice to make known His deeds in all the earth, let us pray to the Lord: Lord, have mercy.

All these things and whatever else You know that we need, grant us, Father, for the sake of Him who died and rose again and now lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God forever. Amen.

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Let us pray for the temporal and eternal needs of both the Church and the world.

For bold, unwavering trust in God's grace, that we may rejoice in all the good gifts from above that we neither merit nor deserve, let us pray to the Lord: Lord, have mercy.

For the faithful proclamation of Christ's saving name, that God's people may be strengthened in the true faith and His Gospel Kingdom extended to all nations, to the very ends of the earth, let us pray to the Lord: Lord, have mercy.

For our congregation, its mission and its people; for the ability to meet the needs that arise as we do the work God has given us to do; and for the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace among us and all the congregations of our Synod, let us pray to the Lord: Lord, have mercy.

For the seminaries of our Synod, our preschools and day schools, that all the baptized, both those who teach and those who learn in them, would be transformed by the wisdom of Christ, let us pray to the Lord: Lord, have mercy.

For the prime minister and parliament, for the premier and legislature of this province; and for all government agencies, civil servants, judges and officers of the law, that peace, security and justice may be preserved, allowing freedom and opportunity to share the Good News of the message of Christ, let us pray to the Lord: Lord, have mercy.

For those who are sick, [especially _____,] that God would grant healing to their bodies and strength to bear their infirmities with patience and grace, let us pray to the Lord: Lord, have mercy.

For all who mourn the loss of family and friends, [especially for _____,] that they may find comfort in the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins and the resurrection of the body, let us pray to the Lord: Lord, have mercy.

For those who suffer from the lack of any human necessity, that those who have been blessed with an abundance may cheerfully share, let us pray to the Lord: Lord, have mercy.

For those who rejoice in the rich blessings of God, that they may always remember the Giver of every gift and give Him heartfelt thanks, let us pray to the Lord: Lord, have mercy.

O Lord, God of heaven and earth, merciful and gracious, holy and loving, graciously receive our prayers, deliver and preserve us for the sake of Jesus Christ, our Lord, our once-for-all sacrifice for sin. Remember not our sins, but forgive, renew and strengthen us to fight the good fight of the faith. Protect us from the assaults and temptations of the devil, the world and even our own sinful flesh. Grant us repentance and faith, holy lives to match godly intentions, and perseverance until You return or call us home, for to You alone we give all glory, honour and worship, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.



LENTEN SERMON

FOURTH SUNDAY IN LENT
March 27, 2022

Sermon Text: Luke 15:11-32

'Two Lost Sons'

Right here in the parable of the prodigal son, in this one simple little story, Jesus lays out the entire Christian faith – repentance, restoration, and rejoicing. The son rebels. He repents. The father restores him by his grace. And there is rejoicing.

Jesus directed this parable to the scribes and the Pharisees who were grumbling over Jesus' table companions. "This man receives 'sinners' and eats with them." Who you ate with meant a lot in Jesus' day. The religious types were quick to note that Jesus kept some unsavoury company at His table – "tax collectors, prostitutes, and sinners." The kind of people with whom a respectable rabbi would not want to be seen with in public, let alone eat with.

And so, Jesus tells them a parable . . . actually, three parables. The first is about a shepherd who loses one of his hundred sheep, who leaves the 99 in the open field to go and search the wilderness for the lost one, and when he finds it, rejoices and throws a party with his friends. The second parable is about a woman who loses one of her ten silver coins, who turns the house upside down, and when she finds it, rejoices and throws a party with her friends and neighbours. The point of the parables is simple: When the lost are found there is rejoicing. And instead of looking down their religious noses at others, the scribes and the Pharisees ought to rejoice when a sinner repents and joins the party. Of course, the ticket to the party is repentance, something of which the religious righteous thought they had no need of. That is what lead into the parable of the prodigal son . . . perhaps better called 'The Parable of the Man with Two Sons.' Now, that word 'prodigal' means exceedingly generous, lavish, extravagant. And while the one son may have been recklessly generous . . . that is, until his money ran out; in reality it is the father who is truly generous . . . a prodigal father.

A man had two sons. The younger one wanted his share of his inheritance from his father ahead of its time. No matter what culture you happen to live in, you will recognize this as a terrible insult to the father. The son basically wishes his father dead. And since the old man appeared to be in good health, he demands his share of the inheritance on the spot. The older son, whose job it would have been to mediate between his father and his younger brother, stands by and does nothing. ‘Good riddance. Give the brat his money and let him go.’

The boy’s father, however, is unusually gracious. He had every right to punish his son for this insult. But instead, he grants his wish, and gives him the share of his inheritance. It must have broken the father’s heart to do that, just as it breaks God’s heart when we turn away from Him and go off on our own . . . when we turn away from the church, when we neglect His Word, when we don’t take our place at His table. But sons are not slaves. They are free to go – free even to reject father, family, and community.

And so, the younger son left on an adventure in a far-away country. And as it has happened so many times in the history of sinful humanity, the son wasted it. We don’t know exactly how it happened. The text simply says it was by “reckless living.” He blew it.

Penniless, the young man found himself in the middle of a famine. And so, he hired on with a citizen of that country who put him to work slopping the hogs. Now for a Jewish boy, for whom pigs were considered unclean, it could not possibly get much lower than that.

And when pig feed began to look good, the young man finally came to his senses. He had a change of mind . . . which is what the word ‘repent’ literally means. He realized what he had lost by leaving his father. He realized that even the lowest of his father’s servants were fed. He was sorry for what he did. He confessed his sin and had it all worked out as to what he would say: “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you.” He humbled himself: “I am no longer worthy to be called your son.” And then, just in case, he worked out a little deal: “Treat me as the least of your servants, as a hired hand.” It seemed like a perfect plan. His father could save face, and he would at least have something to eat.

And so, the young man got up out of the mud and the pig sty and went back to his father’s house, rehearsing his little speech as he went along the road. As

he came toward the village, he saw a figure running toward him. It was his father! He had been waiting and watching. Looking down the road every day. Hoping for the day when he would see his lost son again. When he finally saw him, he was filled with compassion, and ran down the road to meet him. The neighbours were amazed at the sight. Men of means don't run, they walk with dignity and honour. But the father throws all his dignity out the window and embraces his rebellious son and kisses him, even before he says a word.

The son confesses, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son." But the father is barely listening. He's ordering his servants to bring the best robe, his signet ring, sandals for his boy's feet. Kill the fatted calf, start the BBQ, pour the wine, let the party begin. And the son didn't even get to make his deal about becoming a servant.

This was all pure grace on the part of the faith. Undeserved kindness. The father joyfully receives back his rebellious son and restores him to son-ship. The father is really the prodigal one for he is exceedingly generous. This is God's grace toward sinners. His desire to seek and to save the lost. His joy over one lone sinner who repents and desires forgiveness. This is our heavenly Father's zeal to save us – that while we were yet sinners, He sent His Son to die for us.

The son who was lost is found. The son who was dead is now alive. And yes, once we, too, were dead – dead in sin, dead in rebellion against our heavenly Father. But God raised us to life in His Son. He gives us the robe of Jesus' righteousness. He puts His signet ring on our finger. He puts sandals on our feet. He sets a banquet table to celebrate the return of his repentant, rebellious children. So we read: "There is more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents, than over ninety-nine righteous religious ones who have no need for repentance."

Now, the older brother thought he was righteous. He was out in the field, dutifully doing his work, as he always did. He heard the music and the dancing. A servant informs him that, "Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf because he has received him safe and sound." But the older brother was angry, and refused to go to the party.

His father came out to him, as he had come out to meet his younger son on the road. This too is the grace of God. He takes the initiative. He always comes

out to meet His children. He pleads with the older son. “Come and celebrate. Rejoice. Your brother has come home. He was lost, but now is found.”

But the older son won't rejoice. His self-righteousness has robbed him of his joy. He is the obedient son, the good son, the one who always did what his father wanted. Not out of love, but out of duty. “Look,” he says, “all these years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command.” He tries to justify himself. His relationship with his father is defined by the law, by commandment-keeping, by obedience. He's been working so hard all these years trying to earn his father's love and secure a place in the family. And when he realizes that his father deals in grace instead of works, in Gospel rather than Law, in mercy instead of merit, he comes unglued. “All that I've done for you, and you never threw a party for me and my friends.” He disowns his father and slanders his brother. “When this son of “yours” came, who wasted your living with prostitutes (who said anything about prostitutes?), you throw a big party. And now you expect me to come?!” The older son was as lost as the younger one. He too wishes the father, and his brother, dead.

But still, the father remains gracious as ever, just as God is always gracious with us. “Son,” he says, “you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. But it was fitting to make merry and be glad; for this “your” brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost; and is found.”

A man had two sons. Both were sinners. One was lawless without the law; the other was lawless within the law. One rebelled openly; the other rebelled secretly. Both break their father's heart. Both wind up in a far away country – one physically, the other in his heart. Both receive the same fatherly kindness, acceptance, love. Both were forgiven by their father, received as sons, members of the family. Both were in need of repentance – a change of heart and mind; and needed to confess their sin against their father, to receive his mercy and love. One son repented. He confessed his sin against God and his father, and received his father's undeserved kindness. And the other? Well, Jesus deliberately leaves the parable open-ended. Will the older son repent? Will he enter the party? Will he rejoice in the repentance of his brother? Will we?

When we try to define our relationship with God by the Law, by good works, by our obedience, duty, and responsibility we are like the older brother. We will become bitter, resentful, legalistic, judgmental. When we try to earn our way into God's favour, as though God would somehow be bound to us by our obedience, we will wind up hating God and resenting His mercy. We will despise

our brother and our sister. We will refuse to rejoice in their repentance. And we will miss out on the banquet with Jesus. Only as we ourselves repent can we rejoice in the repentance of another. Only as we see ourselves as sinners who cannot save ourselves can we rejoice that Jesus welcomes other penitent sinners to His table. Only as we experience the Father's embrace in our own lives, can we rejoice in His mercy to those around us. The Father, after all, sent His Son Jesus to die for all people, for the worst of sinners, for each one of us without exception. And He calls each of us to humble ourselves, to confess our sin, to receive His robe, His ring, His sandals, His inheritance as His dear children.

We don't deserve any of it. And we don't earn it by our confession or contrition. It's a gift – unearned, undeserved out of the love of God revealed in Jesus Christ . . . a love that seeks all and suffers all in order to save all. There are three words that summarize this parable of the man with two sons: repentance, restoration, and rejoicing.

Repentance. Repentance is the entry to God's banquet hall, the pass to the party prepared in your honour. Christ our Passover Lamb has been slain. The feast is ready. Confess your sin, and humble yourselves before God. It doesn't matter how good you think you are, whether you are the rebellious younger son or the dutiful obedient older son. We all are in need of repentance. Don't try to cut a deal with God. Instead, simply receive His mercy.

Restoration. As the father restored his rebellious son, so God restores us. Once you were rebels . . . lost and dead. Now you are sons and daughters of the Father, alive in Jesus Christ, co-heirs together with Him of eternal life.

Then there is rejoicing. The angels in heaven rejoice over one sinner who repents. Jesus rejoices to welcome repentant sinners to His table. The lost are found. The dead are raised. Rejoice. After all, the Lord is exceedingly generous to us in His own dear, obedient Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.