

LENT 4 YEAR C
JOSHUA 5:9-12
2 CORINTHIANS 5:16-21
LUKE 15:1-3, 11b-32
MARCH 30, 31, 2019

If any are in Christ there is a new creation. The old has passed away and the new has come. We celebrate the baptism of children and adults. We believe that in baptism the old has passed away and the new has come. The one to be baptized goes into the water dying to the old self and rising to a new life with Christ. The old has passed away and the new has come. As we live in the covenant of baptism we make daily repentance and confession to the Lord. Daily we hear the words of forgiveness and new life. As we live in baptism we trust that God has washed the old away and created us new every day. We are reconciled to Christ in our repentance and in returning to the Lord our God. As we make our confession we discover that God did not count our sin against us. God forgave our sin and turned us back again to God. We are reconciled to God through the blood of Jesus Christ. Each of us falls away at one time or another. We walk our own way which is not God's way. Some of us stay away a short time while others stay away longer. God always comes looking for us and waits for us to come back. God is looking for us every day we are gone and God rejoices when we return.

Luke 15:11, 12 Then Jesus said, "There was a man who had two sons. ¹²The younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of the property that will belong to me.' So he divided his property between them.

Jesus came to save people from their sins. He also came to give life. Jesus said that he came to work among those that were sinners saying, "Those that are healthy have no need of a physician, but those that are sick." Jesus came for those that had fallen away and for those that never thought of having a relationship with God. Jesus came for the lost. Jesus came for the scribes, Pharisees and Sadducees even when they did not see the need. The scribes and Pharisees grumbled against Jesus for welcoming sinners and eating with them.

Jesus shared the story of the Prodigal Son. He told this parable in response to the grumbling of the Pharisees and scribes. It is the story of God's abundant grace. It is a story that has many angles.

In this parable, many of us say we identify with the younger son. We identify with the younger son because we know we have wandered away from the grace of God. The truth is that we have wandered away and the Lord welcomed us back. The Lord knew that we turned away to live a life of riotous living. We may not have done anything illegal with our money, but we wasted what we had on carefree living and expensive things. We may not have broken any laws, but we turned away from the Lord in favor of the things and the ways of the world. We have all been there. We have all turned away and been far from the glory of God but how many of us actually left the church? Did you leave the church or Christianity? Most of you have not done any of these things. Most of you have been coming to this church for many years. We are the younger son and we are the older son.

Jesus did not discriminate when it came to the people he spent time with. He ate with Pharisees in their homes and with tax collectors and sinners in their homes. Jesus went wherever he was invited. The Pharisees and scribes spoke against Jesus and his practice of associating with sinners. They grumbled and they complained that Jesus was not doing things in the right way. It could be that they were upset because Jesus was not doing everything right like they were doing everything right. Jesus ate with those kinds of people and he spoke with those kinds of people. Jesus also offered forgiveness to tax collectors and sinners. He offered them what the Pharisees and scribes thought was reserved for them.

In some ways Jesus wants us to identify with the older brother. If we look deeply into this parable we might be able to see how we have been the older brother. Sometimes we see ourselves as the gateway to the church. We know

how things are supposed to be done. Do we keep people out of our congregation because they are too noisy or they are not Scandinavian enough? I know we do an excellent job of welcoming guests into our church. I am pleased that you are eager to greet those that are new. Do we have the same thoughts about those that have left us and perhaps gone somewhere else or nowhere else? Maybe they want to come back. Are they welcome without lots of questions asked?

Luke 15:28, 29 Then he 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, and I have never disobeyed your command; yet you have never given me even a young goat so that I might celebrate with my friends.'

Part of the issue with the older son is that he stayed with his father out of a sense of obligation. He complained to his father that he did everything required of him. He worked in the fields. He took care of his father's finances. Maybe the older son married the right woman and had the right amount of kids. The older son did everything right unlike this younger son that wasted everything and made a fool of his father. The older son did not even get a goat to have a party. Could it be that the older son would have rather been out with the younger brother doing everything he was doing? Could it be that the whole time he was working and caring for his father's things he resented having to do so?

Many Christians are in the same place as the older son. They remained faithful in the church but would like to have cut loose sometimes. They resent having to be so good. They serve the church in a variety of ways but grumble because they have never had a helping hand or a pat on the back. They complain and threaten to quit because they were not recognized for the years of faithfulness but one that did something nice the first time received a certificate. They might grumble because the first time Christian gets the same salvation as one that has been a Christian his or her entire life.

Luke 15:31, 32 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.’”

The father embraced his older son who was angry just as he embraced the younger son that was crawling back to his father. The father loves each of his children. There is a special place in the kingdom for those that remain faithful in service to the Lord but we must rejoice when a lost child returns. Our Lord loves all of God’s children. God loved the Pharisees that did everything right but God also loved those that wandered off and got lost. Jesus came for those that never wandered away and for those that got lost. Those that are lost will eventually die spiritually if they are not found. The Lord desires that no one is lost and that not one dies. God wants all of God’s children at home in the kingdom of God.

Jesus tells this parable that we might know of the Father’s love for all of the children, those that are older and those that are younger. The Lord loves those that have been long time church members and those that are here for the first time. The Lord received those that are Scandinavian and those that are not.

We have all wandered away at one time or another but there is rejoicing in heaven when one of the lost are found. We also must rejoice when a sinner is forgiven. We rejoice when the lost are found and when those that have died come back to life. Our Father in heaven embraces each of us because of God’s great love. When we wander away God invites us back. When we are faithful God is pleased. God is pleased with you today as we gather in this place. Whether you are old or young God is with you and God is smiling. AMEN