

Fourth Sunday of Lent – March 14, 2010 – Good Shepherd Parish

Scripture Reading: Joshua 5:9a, 10-12

The LORD said to Joshua, "Today I have removed the reproach of Egypt from you." While the Israelites were encamped at Gilgal on the plains of Jericho, they celebrated the Passover on the evening of the fourteenth of the month. On the day after the Passover, they ate of the produce of the land in the form of unleavened cakes and parched grain. On that same day after the Passover, on which they ate of the produce of the land, the manna ceased. No longer was there manna for the Israelites, who that year ate of the yield of the land of Canaan.

Psalm: Ps 34:2-3, 4-5, 6-7

R. (9a) Taste and see the goodness of the Lord.

I will bless the LORD at all times;
his praise shall be ever in my mouth.
Let my soul glory in the LORD;
the lowly will hear me and be glad.

Glorify the LORD with me,
let us together extol his name.
I sought the LORD, and he answered me
and delivered me from all my fears.

Look to him that you may be radiant with joy,
and your faces may not blush with shame.
When the poor one called out, the LORD heard,
and from all his distress he saved him.

Scripture Reading: 2 Corinthians 5:17-21

Brothers and sisters: Whoever is in Christ is a new creation: the old things have passed away; behold, new things have come. And all this is from God, who has reconciled us to himself through Christ and given us the ministry of reconciliation, namely, God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting their trespasses against them and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. So we are ambassadors for Christ, as if God were appealing through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who did not know sin, so that we might become the righteousness of God in him.

Gospel: Luke 15:1-3, 11-32

Tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to listen to Jesus, but the Pharisees and scribes began to complain, saying, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them." So to them Jesus addressed this parable: "A man had two sons, and the younger son said to his father, 'Father give me the share of your estate that should come to me.' So the father divided the property between them. After a few days, the younger son collected all his belongings and set

off to a distant country where he squandered his inheritance on a life of dissipation. When he had freely spent everything, a severe famine struck that country, and he found himself in dire need. So he hired himself out to one of the local citizens who sent him to his farm to tend the swine. And he longed to eat his fill of the pods on which the swine fed, but nobody gave him any. Coming to his senses he thought, 'How many of my father's hired workers have more than enough food to eat, but here am I, dying from hunger. I shall get up and go to my father and I shall say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I no longer deserve to be called your son; treat me as you would treat one of your hired workers."' So he got up and went back to his father. While he was still a long way off, his father caught sight of him, and was filled with compassion. He ran to his son, embraced him and kissed him. His son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you; I no longer deserve to be called your son.' But his father ordered his servants, 'Quickly bring the finest robe and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Take the fattened calf and slaughter it. Then let us celebrate with a feast, because this son of mine was dead, and has come to life again; he was lost, and has been found.' Then the celebration began. Now the older son had been out in the field and, on his way back, as he neared the house, he heard the sound of music and dancing. He called one of the servants and asked what this might mean. The servant said to him, 'Your brother has returned and your father has slaughtered the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.' He became angry, and when he refused to enter the house, his father came out and pleaded with him. He said to his father in reply, 'Look, all these years I served you and not once did I disobey your orders; yet you never gave me even a young goat to feast on with my friends. But when your son returns who swallowed up your property with prostitutes, for him you slaughter the fattened calf.' He said to him, 'My son, you are here with me always; everything I have is yours. But now we must celebrate and rejoice, because your brother was dead and has come to life again; he was lost and has been found.'"



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INVITATION TO PRAY

Pause for a few moments of silence and enter more deeply into the presence of God.

Proclaim the Scriptures out loud.

As you listen to the gospel be attentive to a word, a phrase, a question, an image, or a feeling that emerges. Reflect on this quietly or share it aloud.

INVITATION TO REFLECT

Dogs often hang their heads and sometimes grovel when they are scolded. I suppose it is instinctual for them to wheedle their way back into the pack that feeds them. It looks to us as if they are saying, "I'm really, really sorry for what I did and please, please, please forgive me. To make up for it. I will do any base thing you want." Poor dog. And poor prodigal son in this week's [Gospel](#). Everything had gone wrong for him. He threw away his inheritance on riotous living—obviously he would run out of wealth but was having too much fun to notice. A huge famine hit just as he had spent everything. The formerly pampered youth ended up feeding somebody's herd of pigs. He was even jealous of the husks these lucky swine were gobbling. The young man saw what he had done to himself and to his family. It took a lot to get through to him. He also knew he was starving. He made a humble decision to go back and ask for mercy. Imagine him walking the dusty road to his father's estate, practicing his speech over and over. "I have sinned against you and against God. I know I can't be your son any more, just make me a slave and I will eat whatever they eat."

You and I have the same fear too, that our misbehavior disqualifies us from being loved. Often we are terrified to admit our faults, even though the dog is all too ready to admit his. We think God will respond with rage against our sins, which are, in fact, authentically bad. Or we make New Year's resolutions and firm purposes of amendment so that we can be "worthy" before God. Or we hide. But pay very close attention to the young man's father. Does he wait upstairs with his arms folded and a sour face? Not at all. When the youth comes into view, far down the road, still memorizing his lines, the father spots him and sets out running. Watch as they meet amidst the thirsty road-dust, the father embracing and kissing the son, the son trying to stumble out his lines. "I have sinned terribly! I am no longer worthy of . . ." He can't get any further. His father is busy hugging him, calling for the finest robe in the house, a ring for the young man's finger, sandals for his feet, and a huge banquet of celebration. He understands. He is ecstatic that the boy came home. "Father, I am a fool. I am not worthy," you and I say. I know what you have done, child, says God. You needn't cower like the dog. I love you because you are precious to me, not because you never sin. Come, come, have your place within the family. Your brothers, sisters, neighbors and, most of all, I for sure will want to welcome you. Because he holds us so close to his heart, God is willing to take the losses we inflict. Even when we join forces with evil in the world, God waits and prays and welcomes us back with open arms, sins and all. By the way, notice that Jesus' arms are wide open on the cross.

INVITATION TO GROUP SHARING

1. How does God take care of you in your daily life? Was God as present to the Israelites in their daily lives in the Promised Land as in the desert? Is this true for you, metaphorically speaking?
2. Some meanings for reconcile are: forgive, restore harmony, rectify, patch up, reunite, bury the hatchet, appease, arbitrate, bring to terms, kiss and make up. Wherever there is injustice in the world something is not reconciled. What might the Church do to change an unjust or unfair situation? What could your parish do? What can you do?
3. Which of these actions do you think is more effective in bringing sinners back: excluding them or running to meet them with a hug? What about eating dinner with them? What method would you use?

INVITATION TO ACT

Determine a specific action (individual or group) that flows from your sharing. When choosing an individual action, determine what you will do and share it with the group. When choosing a group action, determine who will take responsibility for different aspects of the action. These should be your primary considerations.

CLOSING INVITATION TO PRAY

Give thanks to God (aloud or silently) for new insights, for desires awakened, for directions clarified, for the gift of one another's openness and sensitivity. Conclude with the following: Father of peace, we are joyful in your Word, your Son Jesus Christ, who reconciles us to you. Let us hasten toward Easter with the eagerness of faith and love. We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen