

**Fourth Sunday in Lent – Year C**

**March 31, 2019**

**by**

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**Joshua 5:9-12**

**Psalm 32:2**

**Corinthians 5:16-21**

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

**The Prodigal Son**

Lent is a season of repentance and forgiveness. It's to commemorate Jesus' fasting in the wilderness. If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. But if we confess our sins, God, who is faithful and just, will forgive our sins and cleanse our sins from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:8-9)

In last week's gospel lesson, we heard the parable of a man who wanted to cut down a fig tree because it did not bear fruit. The gardener intervenes by telling the owner 'Sir, let it alone for one more year, until I dig around it and put manure on it. If it bears fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.'(Luke 13:8-9)

The three entities in the story all have clear symbolic significance. The vineyard owner represents God, the one who rightly expects to see fruit on His tree and who justly decides to destroy it when He finds none. The gardener, or vineyard keeper who cares for the trees, watering and fertilizing them to bring them to their peak fruitfulness, represents Jesus, who feed His people and gives them living water. The tree itself has two symbolic meanings: the nation of Israel and the individual.

The beginning of the fifteenth chapter of Luke's Gospel starts with three parables that deal with losing something than finding it again. The first parable tells of a shepherd who leaves the flock behind to go find the lost one. The second parable deals with losing, but than finding a lost coin.

The third parable "The Prodigal Son," deals with a young man that *leaves* home only to lose himself than find himself again. The younger son goes to his father and asks for his share of the estate. The father divides the estate and *gives* the younger son his share.

The young man *leaves* home and goes to a faraway country where he squanders his money and lives lavishly. During this time a famine happens, and the young man becomes destitute. In order to survive, he takes a job as a pig herder, a most demeaning occupation as pigs were unclean animals in the Jewish tradition. But when he came to himself, he said, "How many of my father's hired hands *have* bread enough and to spare, but here I am dying of hunger! I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands." So, he set off and went to his father. But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him. Then the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' But the father said to his slaves, 'Quickly, bring out a robe -the best one---and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals oh his feet. And get the fatted calf and kill it and let us eat and celebrate; for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!' And they began to celebrate. (Luke 15:17-24)

All this attention to the younger son did not sit well with the older brother. He told his father 'For all these years I've been working like a slave for you, and I have never disobeyed your command; yet you've 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 property 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 back to life; he was lost and has been found." (Luke 15:29 - 32)

The attitude of the elder son toward his brother is like that of the Pharisees and scribes who criticize Jesus for associating with sinners.

The hope for reconciliation expressed in Jesus' parable is further reflected in the Apostle Paul's second letter to the Corinthians as he declares: "All this is from God who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the *ministry of reconciliation*" (2 Cor. 5:18). Paul describes God's grace as a "new creation," as old ways have been replaced through the life, death, and Resurrection of Christ: "see everything has become new!"

Psalm 32 says, "Happy are they whose transgressions are forgiven, and whose sin is put away/" No matter how badly we humans screw up. If we ask God to forgive us, God is willing to do so. God's love is unconditional and unending.

Let us pray ... Holy One, we bless your name and thank you for this day: May the Light of the world guide us, the Life of the world refresh us, and the Hope of the world be our companion, that we may be the reconciling power of Christ in the world. We ask this for your mercy's sake. Amen.