



Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church
www.trinitylutheran.ca

CHURCH AT HOME

Announcements:

Welcome to Trinity's worship resource for March 27, 2022, celebrating the Fourth Sunday in Lent.

Pastor Jack Dressler (519-250-7210) is our interim Pastor. Please contact him for any pastoral needs.

** No Wednesday Lenten Service ** and
** There will be NO Maundy Thursday service **

Pastor Jack will be leading the following services:

Palm Sunday April 10

** There will be NO Maundy Thursday service **

Good Friday April 15

Easter April 17

The University Food Bank is struggling to keep their shelves full for their students. During our Lenten journey, let us reach out in love. For the season of Lent, please bring canned food items (beans, fruit, tuna, soup), granola/energy bars, crackers, juice boxes, any other nonperishable food items to church with you. They need our help. We can show God's love to them through our actions.

Thank you again for your support for Trinity. Please continue to mail in cheques, or drop them off in the church's mailbox or make your donation either through PAR or through the Donate button on the church's website, at "www.trinitylutheran.ca".

Introduction

The psalm sets the tone this day: “Happy are they whose transgressions are forgiven, and whose sin is put away!” Happy are those who have “become the righteousness of God” in the merits of Christ Jesus. Happy are those for whom the forgiveness of God has “rolled away . . . the disgrace” of former times. Happy is the father at the return of his prodigal son. Happy are we that our sins are forgiven for Jesus’ sake. Rejoice!

Confession and Forgiveness

All may make the sign of the cross, the sign that is marked at baptism.

In the name of God, who makes a way in the wilderness, walks with us, and guides us in our pilgrimage. **Amen.**

Silence is kept for reflection.

Holy One,

we confess that we have wandered far from you, we have not trusted your promises, we have ignored your prophets in our own day, we have squandered our inheritance of grace, we have failed to recognize you in our midst.

Have mercy on us! Forgive us and turn us again to you. Teach us to follow in your ways, assure us again of your love, and help us to love our neighbor. Amen.

Beloved in Christ, the Word draws near to you, and all who call out to God shall be saved. In Jesus, God comes to you again and again and gathers you under wings of love.

In ✝ Jesus’ name, your sins are forgiven. God journeys with you and teaches you how to live in love. **Amen.**

Worship

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all! **And also with you!**

Prayer of the Day

God of compassion, you welcome the wayward, and you embrace us all with your mercy. By our baptism clothe us with garments of your grace, and feed us at the table of your love, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

Gospel Acclamation

I will arise and go to my father and say, I have sinned against heaven and before you.

First Reading: Joshua 5:9-12

By celebrating the Passover and eating the produce of the promised land instead of the miraculous manna that had sustained them in the desert, the Israelites symbolically bring their forty years of wilderness wandering to an end at Gilgal.

⁹The LORD said to Joshua, “Today I have rolled away from you the disgrace of Egypt.” And so that place is called Gilgal to this day.

¹⁰While the Israelites were camped in Gilgal they kept the passover in the evening on the fourteenth day of the month in the plains of Jericho. ¹¹On the day after the passover, on that very day, they ate the produce of the land, unleavened cakes and parched grain. ¹²The manna ceased on the day they ate the produce of the land, and the Israelites no longer had manna; they ate the crops of the land of Canaan that year.

Psalm: Psalm 32

Be glad, you righteous, and rejoice in the LORD.

¹Happy are they whose transgressions are forgiven,
and whose sin is put away!

²**Happy are they to whom the LORD imputes no guilt,
and in whose spirit there is no guile!**

³While I held my tongue, my bones withered away,
because of my groaning all day long.

⁴**For your hand was heavy upon me day and night;
my moisture was dried up as in the heat of summer.**

⁵Then I acknowledged my sin to you, and did not conceal my guilt.

I said, “I will confess my transgressions to the LORD.” Then you forgave me the guilt of my sin.

⁶**Therefore all the faithful will make their prayers to you in time of trouble;
when the great waters overflow, they shall not reach them.**

⁷You are my hiding-place; you preserve me from trouble;
you surround me with shouts of deliverance.

⁸**“I will instruct you and teach you in the way that you should go;
I will guide you with my eye.**

⁹Do not be like horse or mule, which have no understanding;
who must be fitted with bit and bridle, or else they will not stay near you.”

¹⁰**Great are the tribulations of the wicked;
but mercy embraces those who trust in the LORD.**

¹¹Be glad, you righteous, and rejoice in the LORD;
shout for joy, all who are true of heart.

Second Reading: 2 Corinthians 5:16-21

One way to describe the gospel is the promise that in Christ everything is transformed into newness. All mistakes, all deliberate sins, all old history is reconciled with Christ's resurrection. This is Paul's strong message to the congregation in the city of Corinth.

¹⁶From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, we know him no longer in that way.

¹⁷So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! ¹⁸All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; ¹⁹that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. ²⁰So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.

²¹For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

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

Jesus tells a parable about a son who ponders his father's love only after he has spurned it. The grace he receives is beyond his hopes. That same grace is a crisis for an older brother who believes it is his obedience that has earned his place in the father's home.

¹Now all the tax collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to [Jesus.] ²And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, “This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them.”

³So he told them this parable: ^{11b}“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. ¹³A few days later the younger son gathered all he had and traveled to a distant country, and there he squandered his property in dissolute living. ¹⁴When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that country, and he began to be in need. ¹⁵So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs.

¹⁶He would gladly have filled himself with the pods that the pigs were eating; and no one gave him anything. ¹⁷But 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! ¹⁸I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; ¹⁹I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands."' ²⁰So 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. ²¹Then the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' ²²But 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 on his feet. ²³And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; ²⁴for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!' And they began to celebrate.

²⁵"Now his elder son was in the field; and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. ²⁶He called one of the slaves and asked what was going on. ²⁷He replied, 'Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has got him back safe and sound.' ²⁸Then he became angry and refused to go in. His father came out and began to plead with him. ²⁹But 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. ³⁰But when this son of yours came back, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fatted calf for him!' ³¹Then the father said to him, 'Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. ³²But 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 gospel of the Lord. **Praise to you, O Christ.**

The Sermon: What Do I Know About God (by Pastor Jack Dressler)

A young man had recently been ordained. Shortly after this notable event, he dressed himself with loving care. There was the new, dark, grey suit, the colour-coordinated clergy shirt and the well-polished shoes. As he looked at himself in the mirror, the effect was pleasing. Feeling good about himself, he walked out into the streets of his city. He found himself in a somewhat blighted section of town, hands in his pockets, wondering what to do next. All the time he was being watched by a drunk, who seemed unim-

pressed. Their eyes met and the drunk said, “Sonny, what do you know about God?” The young pastor made no reply. He went back to his room, took off his clerical garb and pondered the question, “What do I know about God?”

The story is ancient and probably the victim of some embellishment, but the question it raises is genuine and timely. “What do I know about God?”

For me, the familiar and popular story of the Prodigal Son contains the best picture in all the Bible of what God is like. It is one of 3 parables (Luke 15), all of which dealing with the same concern. It is a concern for the lost – a lost coin, a lost sheep and a lost son. These stories came about because some of the respectable people of that time were quite critical of the bad company Jesus was keeping. Jesus, by eating with sinners, crossed the line that social custom had carefully drawn. Jesus said, “Rejoice with me.” They said, “This man receives sinners.” So Jesus responds with a memorable story: A father who had two sons . . .” You remember the story.

Remember how the younger son wanted to get away from the farm and probably from his older brother? His father, wanting a son and not a hired hand, let him go. For a while it probably went well for the young son, but the time came when he ran out of money and could no longer do what he wanted and drink the cold frosty ones!” He ended up on a farm feeding the hogs. Someone had said that it is a law of life, “that when we do as we please, we are seldom pleased with what we do.” In any circle, but especially in Jewish circles, the pig pen is a powerful symbol of unfreedom. But it is here where this young person comes to his senses. I suspect it was the push of the hog yard as well as the pull of the father’s house that created within him the spirit of repentance.

This story makes for a very uncomfortable moment when we are finally honest with ourselves and quit the game of pretending, but it is also a great moment. For we are talking about a changed heart, a new direction: and that is what happened to this youngest son. And it looks like a genuine turnaround! There is no hint that he is going to take pride in the fact that he left home and go on TV and tell and retell how awful it was living with those hogs! None of this.

He heads for home and the stage is set for the shattering confrontation. There comes the unbelievable surprise of this story! We expect some kind of punishment. Instead we are told, “But while he was yet at a distance, his father saw him and had compassion, and *ran* and embraced him and kissed him. The word for “ran” is a technical one used for a footrace in a stadium. The father just didn’t amble toward his son, he *raced* toward him. It’s an unforgettable picture – racing down the road, robe lifted high so as not to stumble, so he can hug his wayward son. Love replaces dignity.

I read recently a modern understanding of this beautiful homecoming. It is in the form of a letter from a son to his father: *Dear Dad, I found your letter to me here on the desk. Perhaps you didn't want me to read it, now that I have come back home. But I'm glad I did. I thank you for your patience – for your understanding and love – for your mercy and forgiveness. I thank you also for the wonderful celebration on my return. But Father – it was not the best robe clinging about my starved frame; Father – it was not the ring; nor yet the shoes, not anything your kind, fleet-footed servant brought; Father – not the dancing nor the singing, the feast, nor those who came, showed me your secret, and in part your long sight and your anguished heart. Your friends and neighbours reverencing your ways, might marvel at the thing – But I – my Father – I, your son, a great way from you, saw you run.*

Robe, ring, shoes – they are all powerful symbols of honor which indicate full and complete restoration to the family. There is no probationary period. There are no “I told-you-sos,” no “I suppose-you-are-broke” responses. No, none of those joy-dampening words that most of us are so good at. Rather, the shocking, but wonderful announcement of a party with music, feasting and dancing. For his son was dead and now alive; lost and now found.

So the town drunk who asked the young pastor, “What do you know about God?” raised a legitimate question. Here in this 15th chapter of Luke's gospel we have Jesus' answer, God is like the shepherd who leaves the ninety-nine sheep and goes in search of the one who is lost. God is like the woman who loses a coin and searches diligently throughout the house until she finds it. God is like the father who races out to meet and greet and hug his returning son who has wasted his life in riotous living. This is what God is like!

For me, this is the greatest picture in all scripture. It is the beautiful picture of spontaneous, unconditional acceptance. To interpret this story in any other fashion would be to twist it. The wonder of it, is that this *is* what God is like. Here is the answer to our question, God loves the unlovely ones, the unworthy ones.

This is the heart and center of what we believe. If we believe this story by Jesus Christ, we are saying that, behind and over and under our lives, there is a God who cares for us like the father in this story cared for his sons. Before you go to sleep tonight, or as you sit in your car waiting for the train to go by or standing at the curbside waiting for the bus or just sitting in your lounge chair at home contemplating – think on this picture of the “father racing to his son to welcome him home.” There is no better news than this. And this is the fashion in the way God wants us to treat one another.

I dreamed for my father to race to me, hug me and kiss me, telling me he loved me. But that did not happen until I had enough courage to ask my father to have a conversation with me, just him and me. We had a lot of words with each other but it wasn't until my dad said, "I'll be damned if I give you any praise because I never got any when I was a child." And that's when my father heard himself say what was underneath and didn't recognize what he was doing to his children until that moment. My dad changed after that. We still had work to do but from then on it was different.

There are two sons in this story and the eldest did not share in the rejoicing that his lost brother came back. He too, like my father was busy "keeping score" to prove his dedication and responsibility. I call it the "adding machine spirit", the spirit of always measuring and calculating, which are always big roadblocks to celebration. It seems that this kind of "measuring and judging" invariably leads to comparison, and that leads to condemnation. "All these years I have served you," said the eldest son. Translated it means, "I am not appreciated around here!" You know when we can no longer see beyond the work we have done, then it is hard for us to appreciate love and joy and celebration. We would like to think the eldest son might come join the celebration, but the story does not have this kind of happy ending. The story informs us, "he was angry and would not go in." No one shut him out. It seems that his own goodness created feelings of superiority which in turn made him into an unlovely kind of person. For these reasons I think this is an important story.

I am soon to reach the three quarter century mark of my age. And I know the proverbial sand in the hour glass of time is running out. Although I am not losing a lot of sleep over it, I am concerned as to how I will handle these last years of my life. Will the elder brother spirit overtake me and make me essentially bitter, pessimistic and suspicious of happiness and celebrations. Or will I leave this world with people remembering an essentially positive spirit – one who in spite of growing infirmities could still enjoy life, people and parties?

Over the course of my 43 plus years of ministry, I'm reminded of two people. There was old George, who had a stroke and had been a pastor and a professor, he became a whiner and complainer till the very end, he make life quite miserable for family and all who tried to minister to him. And then there was Mildred. She was a widow for many years. During this time she was a cook in three different restaurants. She was also active in the women's organization of the congregation. For a number of years she served as president. Then she suffered a debilitating stroke and had to be moved to the "old folk's home." But even there, Mildred found meaning and purpose in living.

What makes the difference? This difference ought to be of vital interest to us, as we continue our pilgrimage, for we are on a journey home. But we are going home not to the arms of an elder brother, but to the arms of our Father who runs out to meet us. “And he raced to his son . . . he said to his servants, bring quickly the best robe . . . we are going to have a party.” What a welcome! He was equally patient and kind to his disrespectful and uptight eldest son. “My son,” the father answered, “You are always here with me and everything I have is yours.”

This is what our God is like. May this picture of God become ever more meaningful and more importantly real for us, like the little girl who, in her Sunday bedtime prayers prayed, “God, I had a good time in church today, I wish you could have been there.” May we, whatever our age, continue to have the time of our life, with this, the greatest story for any time. **Amen.**

Peace

The peace of the Lord be with you always.

The Prayers of Intercession

Drawn close to the heart of God, we offer these prayers for the church, the world, and all who are in need.

Jesus formed the disciples in the ways of extravagant mercy and profound welcome. Lead your church to be a community marked by forgiveness, hospitality, and celebration. Send us to transform a world plagued by fear and condemnation. Merciful God, **receive our prayer.**

You make the land to produce a harvest that sustains your entire creation. Equip farmers and farm workers who till the soil. Nourish the earth with ample rainfall and abundant sunshine. Heal grounds tainted by pollution or misuse. Merciful God, **receive our prayer.**

Countries are divided and leaders often harbor grudges. Reconcile nations that experience conflict. Act quickly to bring an end to war. Anoint peacemakers trained in the art of diplomacy and foster a spirit of collaboration among political rivals. Merciful God, **receive our prayer.**

Your people cry for help in times of distress. Resolve disagreements among family members. Save those experiencing financial hardship. Hear our prayers for those who are sick or grieving. Console us with the promise that everything can become new. Merciful God, **receive our prayer.**

Your love comes to us when a table is set and a feast is prepared. Bless the feeding ministries of this congregation. Bring an end to hunger in our community and around the world. Merciful God, **receive our prayer.**

God of presence, bless those of this community who cannot be with us this morning, and those who walk with them, especially:

In Residence: Margaret; Maria; Stan; Katie; Katherine; Cordelle; Dorothy

Needing our prayers: Ed; Pastor Mike & Patti, Donna; Sharon B

Friends of our Members Needing our prayers: Audrey; Greg; Paul; Hilda; Mary

...and all members who may have needs unknown to us

And all those we name in our hearts...

Merciful God, **receive our prayer.**

The one who was dead is alive again. We give thanks for those who have died, confident that steadfast love surrounds them. Shelter them in your love until we are gathered at your heavenly banquet. Merciful God, **receive our prayer.**

Accept the prayers we bring, O God, on behalf of a world in need, for the sake of Jesus Christ. **Amen.**

Lord's Prayer

Lord, remember us in your kingdom, and teach us to pray:

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.

Benediction

You are children of God, anointed with the oil of gladness and strengthened for the journey. Almighty God, motherly, majestic, and mighty, bless you this day and always.

Amen.

Dismissal

Go in peace. Jesus meets you on the way. **Thanks be to God.**