

Sunday March 27 2022 Lent 4 Welcome Home!

2 Corinthians 5:16-21 Luke 15:1-3, 11-31

“God’s grace for us all” has been our theme throughout Lent. What does this mean for those who are unsure of God in their lives or how one might understand what ‘grace’ means for everyone. What sets Christianity apart from all other faiths is God’s grace. It is not love as we have defined love in all of its forms eros, agape, philia, Ludus, Storge, Philautia or pragma. But is a combination of all love and yet still is something that is distinct. It is the compassion one expresses for another. So how we express and share God’s grace?

Paul’s letter to the Corinthians reminds this young church about the need for reconciliation between individuals and God. Jesus was born into this world as a human baby. His purpose was clear to save the people from sin and to enable everyone to be reconciled with God. This reconciliation is what is needed in order for people to live again in understanding and contentment. It is because Jesus died and rose from death in order for people to share their sins. God the Father would forgive and this enables reconciliation to occur because one’s perspective has changed and hearts have been open for changes. We are no longer accountable to other groups or leaders, but accountable only to God. For God alone forgives us and enables us to begin again. This is why we can say the words of 2 Cor 5:17 “Anyone in Christ is a new creation, the old has passed away and all things are made new. Through these words we are assured of forgiveness and reassurance that our lives belong to God.

Grace and reconciliation? These are two topics which seem to have nothing in common. But in the parable read from Luke 15 we must take a closer look for God’s grace and reconciliation are key proponents. This parable has been called the Prodigal Son based upon the spending actions of the son who left the farm for a better life. In contrast to this, both the younger son and the father should be given this title as well—for both are recklessly spendthrift in their actions. There were two groups of people listening to Jesus- tax collectors and sinners and Pharisees and the teachers of the law. That is, known sinners and cheats as well as the leaders of the synagogue. People who are new to understanding Jesus’ teachings and wanting more about how to live and those who learned people who are living by the laws of God with nary an interest in hearing Jesus’ words.

Jesus then says, “there was a man who had two sons. The younger son went up to his father and asked for his share of the estate. That is, he wanted his inheritance before his father died. As the younger son this is what he would be entitled to receive 1/3 of the assets and 2/3

would go to the older son. Those listening would be in awe and wonder of Jesus' story as this request would be disrespectful from the younger son's point of view. He really was asking for his father to be dead so he could get what was owed to him. Ironically, the father complied with his wish. One can only imagine what the father was feeling as he sold off part of his land in order to give what was asked to the younger son. It was an act of love as he tears apart the farm. The assets were properly divided and the younger son wants out and leaves the farm.

Meanwhile the older son now has to make the farm work with only 2/3 of the accounts available to him. He also knows that he will inherit everything but there is also resentment building. But nothing is said.

The younger son leaves and goes to where no one knows him and squanders everything he owns on whatever his money can buy. His actions are prodigal meaning recklessly extravagant and all has been spent. He soon finds himself having to feed pigs in order to get something to eat. For him to do this was lowering himself even more as Jewish people do not eat pork. When the younger son sees what he is feeding them, there is a moment where he comes to his senses. He has hit the bottom and now he realizes what he has done and how badly his life's choices have been. He realizes that the father's hired men have more food than they want and he is dying of hunger. He decides to return to the farm because he wants to survive. He is bankrupt, and is now dazed and disillusioned. He is now stuck and facing life and death decisions. As he journey backs to the farm he prepares his speech to his father again and again. "I will be a hired hand to you and you need only to pay me this amount."

This son comes within sight of the house. The father sees him and runs- not a sight for a distinguished estate owner- but here he was lifting up his robes and runs. He falls by him, kisses him and in this moment the father too is prodigal—lavishing much upon him- through hugs, kisses, getting a servant to bring him one of his robes, and welcomes him home. With extravagant love put upon the younger son, a feast of a calf was prepared and the neighbourhood was invited. There is no mention of being a hired hand at the farm. But there is a feast going with music and dancing all to celebrate the reconciliation and restoration of the younger back into life family and community. The young son knew that in his father's house there was abundant food to spare. But in this moment there is also grace. The father's love is so great that there is nothing that the son has done which cannot be forgiven or matched by his grace. (Timothy Keller, "Prodigal God")

Meanwhile, the older brother is also lost. He hears only from the servants that there is a party for his brother and he is furious. He refuses to attend and be a part of his father's actions. But when the father speaks to him the older son is rude and pouts about what was spent on the younger son. It is the words of the father again, extravagantly speaking his love to this son who says- "despite your rudeness in public I want you to attend the feast. I'm not disowning either of you but I want you to swallow your pride and come to the feast. These words offer grace to the older son who seeks reconciliation and hope from his father.

Jesus then ends the story saying that the younger son was lost and is now found. But so is the older son- lost—in the mix of the transactions which took place to meet the wishes of the younger son. He has stayed to work hard and follow the rules. But when all is completed—the father loves both of his sons and wants everyone to be reconciled through his grace.

God is the one who is Prodigal as well- so says Timothy Keller in his book *The Prodigal God*. God recklessly lavishes his grace upon all those who turn and return and come back to him. And God will not give up until those who have squandered their gifts elsewhere, return. God will run to you and accept you in your present circumstances and bestow his grace on you. All because you love him and are willing to be reconciled to him again.

We don't what happened on the farm after the feast ended. Did the older son hug his brother? Maybe not right away- but in time they each realized their role on the farm.

There are many people who have wasted their blessings and talents on foolishness and poor choices in these days filled with anxiety, stress and uncertainty. There are others who have lived by the rules and followed through with their skills and knowledge to help us move through this pandemic into a new era. But one thing is certain, God's grace is available for us all. God's grace is immeasurable and is available for all to receive. How do we understand this? We seek to know Jesus and what it means to be reconciled through him. We believe and now as God's grace is lavished upon us through faith, we need to respond with hope. We need to reach out to others to tell them again—God is here for us all, God is with you in each moment and God is ready to run to you, meet you part way and welcome you through his loving embrace.

If you believe, that God's grace is given to you, then you will know that Paul's statement from 2 Cor 5:17 is true. You are a new creation in God; the old has gone and the new begins. Let us remember this as we seek to move into our future- with its anxieties, stress and uncertainty. Let us grow in God's grace working in us all for the sake of all people.

Let us remember this as we seek God's grace and know that he is willing to receive us unto himself. In faith and with hope, God is waiting to welcome us home.

Let us pray:

God of grace and love, we thank you that you continue to call us and show us your way.

Bless us as we reconcile our hearts to you and lead us to live your way. We ask in Jesus' name. Amen