

**Sermon for Fourth Sunday in Lent  
Year C**

**[RCL] Joshua 5:9-12; 2 Corinthians 5:16-21; Luke 15:1-3, 11b-32; Psalm 32**

The Prodigal Son is a story familiar to all of us and movingly depicted in art, drama and dance. We like stories like this; ones with happy endings where people come to their senses and are restored to the family.

But that isn't how it always happens, is it? We know of many estrangements between fathers and sons, mothers and daughters. A mother recently phoned her ex husband whom she had divorced many years ago. She wanted to have his help to restore her relationship with her lost daughter; but, as her husband told her, "That ship has sailed." Her daughter was no longer interested, and there was apparently nothing her mother could do to change that.

The parable emphasizes that God is not like that in how God loves us. God desires our return, which is one of the themes of Lent. We, like sheep, have gone astray.

Now, deep in Lent some of us begin to learn the cost. We are hungry for the bread of life; weary of the cheap and tawdry excesses that we choose because that is what we are taught is living by the world.

Today we are invited to holy living, a turning around, and a return to sanity; a restoration of our relationship with our creator and redeemer. Even though we took the cheap route and asked for grace in advance, even though we tried it all in our flagrant lives of spending and using the resources we should have husbanded and shared, there is a pull to return.

Perhaps you have decided Lent hasn't worked out for you this year. There were too many distractions: projects at work, income taxes, wintery weather, stress, nothing offered at Church you were interested in – the list can be as long as you like. Maybe next year.

Or, maybe now? All it takes for the prodigal son is to turn around. Just one action changes everything. He has a speech rehearsed, but picture in your mind the father seeing his son from afar and running to meet him. Do you think he waited for the son's speech? Of course not. He ran to him and embraced him. The time to talk came later. In one sequence from a ballet version of this story the son crawls up to his father, then the son climbs up onto him, and his father, who is wearing a voluptuous robe, embraces his son until he is completely enfolded in the robe. That is the vision that awaits us.

So, harmony restored and back in the fold, life for us can go on. But that is not why we have the story of the Prodigal Son today. The intention of this parable is more than just a restoration of relationships with a loving God.

The passage from Second Corinthians begins with the words:

“From now on, we regard no one from a human point of view... we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.”

This business of being reconciled isn't about us as much as it is about what we are commissioned to do. We are to be ambassadors for Christ. Or, as we are instructed in the Catechism in the Book of Common Prayer, we are “to represent Christ and his Church; to bear witness to him wherever [we] may be.”

We cannot do this without our relationship with God and each other, and that restoration gives us the energy and guidance to do the work for which we were baptized. As is often said, “You may be the best Christian someone has ever met.” And then, like the father in the parable, we wait patiently, prayerfully, for the return of those to whom we are sent.

Lent is not just about each of our journeys and us. It is also about to whom we are sent and how we minister to the other, the stranger, the friend, the family member who see no need for a relationship with God or the community of faith. It is about having the strength to give a cup of cold water to the least and the lost. It is about sorrowing over what we have done to creation and finding ways to help restore it. It is about sewing seeds of hope in the midst of darkness and chaos.

So far Lent may have been nothing to you. But today determine it is the time for you to approach the holy table with repentance and faith that God meets you and will feed you with the body of Christ, the bread of heaven. Savor this moment as a time when God is reaching out to you, hoping you will return. Let God's arms enfold you, and feel the removal of all your sins. Then, having been fed the bread of life, walk out the door into God's world prepared to be an ambassador for Christ. The Spirit will direct you to whom you are to go. Amen.

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