

Stretching Toward Sunday

Thoughts, readings and reflections
based on this week's lectionary readings

March 31, 2019
Fourth Sunday in Lent, Year C

The readings this week:

- Joshua 5:9-12 ◦ Psalm 32
- 2 Corinthians 5:16-21 ◦ Luke 15:1-3, 11b-32

[Click here to read this week's Scriptures](#)

Prodigality

Henri Nouwen,(1932-1996) in his book on The Return of Prodigal Son, writes about the week he spent in meditation of Rembrandt's painting of the same name that hangs in The State Hermitage Museum in St Petersburg. For hours he sat alone in silence, using the image as an icon. (Look up: [The Return of the Prodigal Son \(Rembrandt\) Wikipedia](#))

I imagine we all have stories of our own prodigality, the waste of our resources, energy, thought, over giving, Let us count the ways. It may not be a good Idea for the parish to hear of all your prodigal days.

Even so, my years in college and in Seminary were the result of my fathers VA benefit after WWII. He had been killed in action and so the benefit for education that would have gone to his going to Middlebury College, came to me. I spent those college days in less study and more prodigality. Certainly I had to work two or three jobs to supplement college and seminary tuition and fees and I was often too bushed to study. But I "could" have been a lot more disciplined. I probably owed that to my father.

And yet, I wonder if there is a part of us that needs to break away from the assigned roles of family, culture, and nation. Isn't there a part that needs to get away from the farm, suburb or the neighborhood to see the world?

Maybe that is why the father is so prodigal with his generosity. The son who is lost and is found has learned a hard lesson about life. He has also learned humility and gratitude. Not that the father in his prodigal generosity needs a reason, he may see the necessity of getting out from under the heavy burden of duty and hyper-critical responsibility.

The elder son may never get it. Hide and duty bound, he is like that part of us that has always shown up. He's always been on the job, never took a break. Often there is no greater resentment than that of those

who have given much. Loyal and stuck, the father reminds him so painfully and elegantly," My boy, you have been with me all these years, there is nothing I have that is not also yours" The father presents an opportunity for the elder son to turn and receive his brother, to turn toward the light and the gaiety and the dance—or to turn away from his brother and the love of his father and walk into the darkness.

Some would probably say the father is over generous. And isn't that just like God. Always ready to give away the shirt off her back: such prodigality. What will we ever do with her?

The prodigal and the elder son, certainly, live within. We may even have seen flashes of the merciful father once in a while. For as the poet Jane Kenyon wrote shortly before she died;

"And God, as promised, proves to be mercy clothed in light."

~ [Stories from a Priestly Life](#)



One of the hardest things in the world is to stop being the prodigal son without turning into the elder brother.

~ John Ortberg

Reflecting on the Word

Word



___ 1st Reading: [Joshua 5:9-12](#)

Using verse 9, what do you think it means that God had rolled away Israel's shame or reproach of their slavery in Egypt? How has God rolled away the shame or reproach of your captivity to sin? Using verse 10, why/what did Israel celebrate? New Testament believers are not required to celebrate Passover. Instead we celebrate Easter. How does our Easter celebration fulfill the Passover celebration? How certain are you that God has "passed over" the judgment for your sin? Why would/should God "pass over" His judgment toward you?

Monday Night Bible Study

___ Psalm Reading: [Psalm 32](#)

What reasons does David give in the first 2 verses for being joyful? Have you ever thought that God might be disciplining you? How do people try and find security? What would David say in response to those things? Why does David confess his sins to God? What stops us confessing our sins to God? What might happen if we did confess more? Does verse 10 promise us that we will never be sorrowful if we trust in Jesus? What does it mean? What is the best pathway for your life? If David had a personal motto, or statement about life, based on this Psalm, what might it be? *Trinity Church Mount Barker*

I can't hear this story too many times. I am the son returning again and again. I am the father scanning the horizon watching for the impossible and then embracing it in my arms. I am the revelers in the far-away town, I am the servants in the father's household, and I am the older brother in tears of rage, uncomprehending and exasperated.

Lent gives me time to find myself- my true self - for better or for worse, and usually both. Lent gives me time to work on habits that alienate me from myself, and from God, and from my loved ones. I learn to see the "edited" version of myself for what it is, and to step back from the "cult of this shadow" I've created of myself. Lent teaches me to wake up in the middle of the waking day to a fuller awareness of my state of mind, to repent, to turn around toward the Loving Presence watching for me. Lent teaches me the subversion of loving and being loved. Lent prepares me to accept my authentic self, which is love.

~ Suzanne Guthrie, *At the Edge of Enclosure*

Praying Toward Sunday

O Prodigal God, wastefully loving, recklessly extravagant with grace, excessively generous with forgiveness, liberal with tender mercy and compassion, lavish with hope and delight: you shower us with love that we are not prepared to receive. You know the hurt beneath our fleeing, the fear enclosed in our anger and our clutching of what is deserved. You embrace us freely and passionately, free from our past, knowing and healing our pain, in the present moment, celebrating.

You have recklessly given us your love: may we spread it wantonly, give it all away, spend it on the unlovely, waste it on the unworthy. May we set aside our pride and practice delight. May we claim again the siblings we have spurned, and gladly celebrate those we have excluded. May we offer hospitality to the unlovely, forgive where it is unwarranted, and love when it is unreasonable.

In your love may we love lavishly, without exception or measurement. Yes, it will break our hearts; we shall be taken advantage of, and worse— we shall be crucified, and only your love will remain. And then for us, who have died and are alive again you will give a great feast. By your grace may this life be a reunion, a celebration, a resurrection, that in prodigal love we may know your joy, your giving, dancing, feasting, running, embracing joy.

~ Steve Garnaas Holmes, *Unfolding Light*

___ 3rd Reading: [2 Corinthians 5:16-21](#)

What do you think it means when "church people" talk about being a new creation? In what ways do you see yourself as a new powerful creation or simply a person isolated in a confusing world (or both at the same time)? What might sometimes keep you from feeling like a powerful new creation? How does knowing the story of this letter – that Paul was hoping to reconcile a broken relationship – help you to better understand this passage? Paul says that once we are in Christ we are a "new creation." Obviously we don't instantly begin acting this way, so what do you think Paul really means, especially in the context of this letter? Paul speaks of Jesus as a reconciler. In what ways does Jesus repair our broken relationship with God? In what ways are we a part of the "ministry of reconciliation" described in verse eighteen? If Jesus already accomplished this, what is our role supposed to be? In what ways can our reconciliation with God begin to bring change to our other broken relationships? *Faith Element*

___ 4th Reading: [Luke 15:1-3, 11b-32](#)

In this Lenten season, in what ways do we feel alienated from all that is going on around us, perhaps even from those we hold most dear? Do you find the younger son's repentance troubling? Why or why not? Are there people whom we consider deserving of their fate, who do not "deserve" forgiveness quite so easily? How do you think a "prodigal church" would behave? We all know that Lent leads to Easter; what is the resurrection you long for in this season? *Weekly Seeds*