

In His Place

Putting our hearts in Jesus' heart; our hands in Jesus' hands; moving beyond thinking into the realm of doing

Seeing through Jesus' eyes

The Parable of the Prodigal Son has probably received more analysis than any other passage in the Gospels. It has been depicted in art, literature, music and ballet and there is even debate over what to call the parable. We are going to look at it today in the context of what each character has to teach us and some would recommend we call it the Parable of the Prodigal Son, the Waiting Father and the Elder Brother.

Read Luke 15:11b-24, think of people you know who are like the Prodigal Son. Could it be you?

The younger son of a wealthy man asks for and receives his inheritance and then follows his dreams to the big city. While there he gives in to the temptations that he sees and loses all the money he came with. Finding himself impoverished he finds employment with someone who is very unlike himself. He is employed doing something that his family would find very offensive so on top of the poverty he is feeling shame because they will not approve of him should he return. But one day he comes to himself and realizes that he would be better to be a slave in his father's household so he decides to return.

Upon returning the son wants to confess his sins to his father, state his unworthiness and ask to be treated like a hired hand. But the father sees his son and recognizes him from afar, he runs out to greet him accepts his confession and statement of contrition before cutting him off and welcoming him back into the family.

Some people would say that the son had been born again and turned toward God, who accepted him without having to do penance for his misdeeds. Do you agree?

Read Luke 15:25-32, think of people you know who are like the Elder Brother. Could it be you?

The Elder Brother watched his younger son walk away down the road chasing his dreams and wished that he could go along, but somebody had to stay behind and work the farm for the father. His only reward is that he would be treated well by his father for remaining faithful and because of this he started to feel pride in staying behind and being the "good

son."

Then one day he returns from the field to hear music playing and to smell meat roasting. What could be the reason for the celebration? A worker tells him that his brother has returned and his father is celebrating. He reacts by refusing to join the party. Why should he celebrate his brother's return? Why hasn't his father celebrated his presence every day?

His father comes out tells him that he is cherished and that he will not lose out on anything because he was good. But the father must celebrate because he had thought the younger son was dead.

Do you agree with the father?

What is our role as the father in the parable? Jesus is telling this parable to the scribes who disapproved of Jesus eating with tax collectors and sinners. Who would you consider the outsiders in today's society?

As Jesus and the father, shouldn't you be reaching out to them?

**Fourth Week
of Lent**

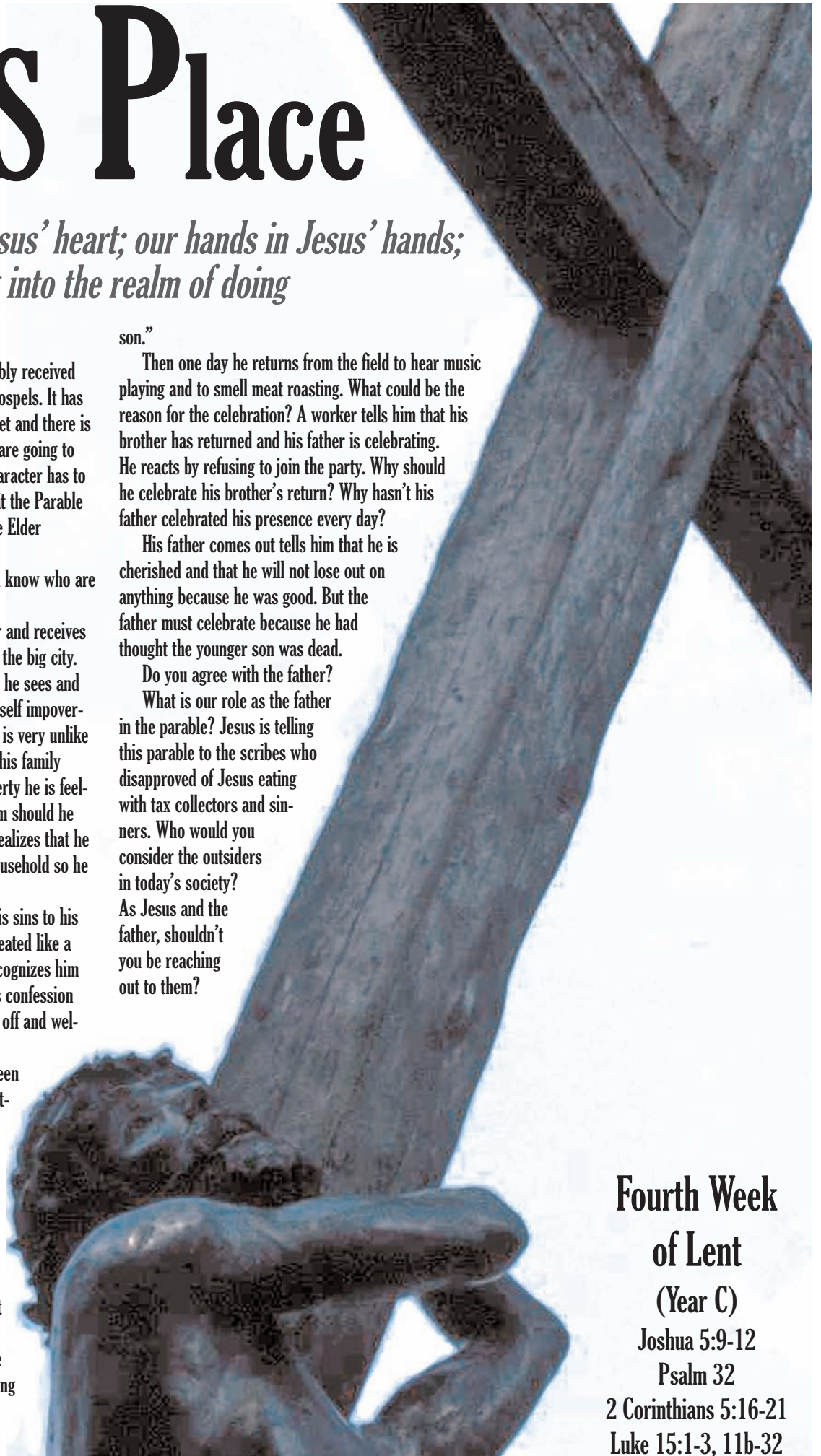
(Year C)

Joshua 5:9-12

Psalm 32

2 Corinthians 5:16-21

Luke 15:1-3, 11b-32



A new way to look at traditional problems

Joshua 5:9-12

The Israelites wandered in the wilderness for 40 years relying on God for manna, quail and water but now they are in Canaan, the land of their ancestors. They celebrate the Passover harvest festival and eat the crops of Canaan and on that day God quits sustaining them with manna. Now they will provide food for themselves from the land.

For most of us we get our food from the grocery store and if we are lucky enough to have a bit of land we might keep a vegetable garden. But most in America have lost touch with the agricultural system that gets the food to our table. We don't even think about it, we just expect it to be on the store shelves. And we expect that what is on the shelves will be safe for us to eat.

In the last year our food has been threatened by E. coli in spinach and reports of mad cow always make us question the safety of beef. While those threats to the food we eat grab headlines because there is an immediate cause and effect there are other things to think about when it comes to food safety:

"We support policies that protect the food supply and that ensure the public's right to know the content of the foods they are eating. ... We urge independent testing for chemical residues in food, and the removal from the market of foods contaminated with potentially hazardous levels of pesticides, herbicides, or fungicides; drug residues from animal antibiotics, steroids, or hormones; contaminants due to pollution that are carried by air, soil, or water from incinerator plants or other industrial operations. ... We oppose weakening the standards for organic foods."

There was a time when our food was only threatened by the dangers of drought, flood, locusts and various bugs but when we industrialized we created more dangers to ourselves. The loaves of bread on the shelves may seem like manna but we have work to ensure that the food is really safe for us to eat.

¶ 160-F Book of Discipline

2 Corinthians 5:16-21

This short passage is referred to as Jesus' ministry of reconciliation in part because some form of the word "reconciliation" appears in this passage five times. But how is this ministry of reconciliation applied to our society?

One of the ways is through restorative justice, which works to hold perpetrators of crime accountable for their actions to the person(s) victimized by that crime. The church endorses this system of justice that tries to bring healing to all of the parties in the crime: the offender, victim and families and the community.

"In the love of Christ, who came to save those who are lost and vulnerable, we urge the creation of a genuinely new system for the care and restoration of victims, offenders, criminal justice officials, and the community as a whole." This does not mean completely replacing our current retributive justice system but working in concert with it.

Restorative justice is just one of the measures that the church recommends in regards to the criminal justice system. The church also pushes for preventative measures such as "social conditions that to crime." The church also endorses community policing where the members of the community work with law enforcement members to reduce crime in their neighborhood.

This can be as simple as Neighborhood Watch and complex as community leaders meeting with law enforcement officials to let them know who are dangerous criminals and who needs help to be turned away from the "wrong path." A troubled neighborhood in Boston worked with police in the latter way, including weekly meetings with law enforcement, that lead to a drastic decrease in violent crime in the 1990s.

"The church is transformed when it responds to the claims of discipleship by becoming an agent of healing and systematic change." When we approach of problem with only one set of solutions the problem continues but by approaching from many angles there are more possibilities for actual change.

¶ 164-F Book of Discipline

Prayer

Morning

Almighty God, I have sinned, I am no longer worthy of being your child, treat me like one of your hired hands. Amen.

Evening

Almighty God, you have forgiven me for everything I have done, help me to forgive those around me for what they have done and welcome them into my heart as members of your family. It is only when we welcome everybody that we are truly your children. In Jesus name we pray, Amen.

Psalm reading

Psalm 32

Write down a phrase that sticks out to you in the morning and carry it with you throughout the day. Think about it when you can.

If you are doing journaling write your thoughts about the phrase at night.

Pick a new phrase each day.

Becoming disciples

Monday

Rivalry between brothers is a common biblical theme, read Genesis 4:2-8; 25:27-34; 27:1-36 and/or 37:1-4. Why do you think siblings are so often depicted this way? What does it mean for the larger family of God?

Tuesday

Read 2 Corinthians 5:17 and Isaiah 43:18-19. What does "new creation" mean? What are some things that need to be created anew or looked at in a completely new way?

Wednesday

Read Genesis 1:28-30. Some Bible translations have God giving "dominion" over all living beings and some "stewardship." What does the different translations imply to you? Which do you prefer and how does that effect how you treat the earth?

Thursday

"My days are in the yellow leaf;/The flowers and fruits of love are gone;/The worm, the canker, and the grief/Are mine alone!

"The fire that on my bosom preys/Is lone as some volcanic isle;/No torch is kindled at its blaze —/A funeral pile." — Lord Byron, "On This Day I Complete My Thirty-Sixth Year"

In baptism we are "born anew." How does this partial poem relate to the Younger Son and the practice of baptism?

Friday

"We believe in the right and duty of persons to work for the glory of God and the good of themselves and others in the protection of their welfare in so doing; in the rights to property as a trust from God, collective bargaining, and responsible consumption; and in the elimination of economic and social distress." — "Our Social Creed," paragraph 5, from Book of Discipline 2004, page 125.