



Calvary Presbyterian Church
Sunday, March 26, 2023

LENT 5: "Smashing Alabaster: Shards of Light"
Pastor Eyde Mabanglo

INTRO TO SCRIPTURE

Our Lenten sermon series is called **Smashing Alabaster: *breaking open our hearts and pouring out our lives***. The theme of smashing alabaster is based on the book **THE CHURCH CRACKED OPEN** by Stephanie Spellers where Rev. Spellers proposes that the church is like the alabaster jar that the woman in the upper room breaks open in order to anoint Jesus. The disciples are critical of her for wasting the expensive nard, but Jesus lifts her up for allowing it to pour freely. So, for the last several weeks we've been exploring how we as individuals and as a church may need to break open our hearts and let our lives pour freely out to this whole world that God so loves.

SCRIPTURE

Luke 15:1-3, 11-32

The Parable of the Lost Sheep

¹Now all the tax collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to him. ²And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, "This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them."

³So he told them this parable:

The Parable of the Prodigal and His Brother

¹¹Then Jesus^[a] said, "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.'"

SERMON

On Ash Wednesday, I introduced this theme of Smashing Alabaster as we prepared for a 40-day journey into self-examination. With the imposition of ashes on our forehead—a placement suspiciously close to our brains, minds (essentially our control centers)—we heard how we are earth and will return to earth as a place not just for burial, but a place where life begins, germinates, matures, and flourishes. That earth is the source of our own birth, rebirth, regenerative and resurrected hearts, and minds.

And on the first Sunday in Lent, we joined Jesus as he entered the desert for a time of fasting, centering, and regenerative preparation, and guidance from the Holy Spirit. It was here that he was tempted to make choices between self-preservation, power, and position, but the Bible passage reminded us of how

Jesus remained steadfast and clung to his identity as the son of God and his purpose of reconciling the world to himself and to his father.

In today's passage, we hear a parable about two sons who also must wrestle with the temptations of this life. How do they understand their own identity, their purpose in this life and their relationship with their father?

The parable says that the younger son came to himself while away in the far country. How far must we travel in time or distance or heart space before we come to ourselves and long for home? Is 40 days sufficient?

Then a week later, we introduced the beautiful image of God's people living in a flourishing beloved community. Maybe this was the very image that called the younger son home. He forged a plan to come back to his father and begged to be accepted even if demoted to be one of his servants.

That story that Jesus tells the Pharisees that day is one where both sons have willingly separated themselves from home. Both are complicit in choosing self over the welcome of their father. The younger son experiences a breaking of his heart and an authentic pouring out of himself. He acknowledges that he is complicit, and then returns home with a contrite heart. And the ancient scriptures tell us that a contrite heart, God will NOT deny. This is also what we see played out in a dramatic way as the younger son is met by his father who has been watching and waiting for his beloved son's return home to him.

Beloved community is when we, like God, reach out in order to help everyone grow, mature, and flourish.

The father in today's passage meets his sons, both of his sons, where they are at. He meets the younger son on the road. He meets the older son in the field, outside of the homestead. He breaks all social conventions of the day, he divests from the defaults of empire, gathers up his tunic and secures it around his waist so he can run to his beloved son walking the dusty road before him. A scene that you would not see in the first century. Like an aircraft carrier making all the necessary adaptations and course corrections to meet a jet running out of fuel, the father meets both his sons where they are at, greets them both with an unconditional welcome, and an invitation to gather around a table and celebrate beloved community—to celebrate the golden moments of reconnecting that which is broken and those who are lost. It was on this mid Lenten Sunday morning that we heard about Jesus meeting the two pairs of fishing brothers where they were at and invited them to become gatherers who would learn also how to meet

people where they are at and use God's grace like gold in reconnecting the world with the God who watches and waits for us all.

Last week we took a second glance at the calling of the first disciples. It was a story of sons, two sets of brothers, divesting their contracts to fish, dropping their nets that help them gather fish and becoming gatherers of people. Jesus' actions at the Lakeshore are consistent with what he is doing and today's passage as well.

Jesus is himself a son, addressing many sons in the crowd who are Pharisees and scribes—the religious elite within the community. Jesus then begins to tell a series of stories about the grief of lostness and the beauty of found-ness—to gather sons, to gather daughters, to gather beloved communities and welcome them all home. Jesus as a son and a mother hen, the Incarnate word of God, is trying to tell all sons that all sons are welcome—that the world that God so loves is being welcomed home.

When we get this welcome right, we are like shards of light. We are beach glass broken and scattered, but also worn down and made beautiful. We should all just go to the beach right now and collect some beautiful beach glass. We should all go into the world and be beautiful beach glass--shards of light as we reflect, as we illuminate the One who is Light—the One who is Love.

Today, we, as God's church, must hear the story of the lost sons again and consider ways that we are complicit at times to separating ourselves, and others, from home. The church must come to itself and return to her truest identity, evaluate her proximity to the father, and forge a plan to go home. The church will find an unconditional welcome and then be invited to share that welcome with all of her brothers and sisters. In this way, we can become a Shard of Light.

Someone summarized this passage in Luke 15 as:

I love you
I forgive you
Let's eat

This is the summation of all of God's scripture and it is the mandate of God's heart. That's why on Maundy Thursday or mandate Thursday we reflect on Jesus washing his friend's feet and telling them to love as they are loved. As we approach Holy Week, may we come to ourselves and become the gatherers who gather gatherers. May we become beautiful shards of light by telling everyone: I love you. I forgive you. Let's eat.

May it be so. May it be so.

