

2022.03.27

## First Reading

*Psalm 32*

Happy are those whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.

<sup>2</sup> Happy are those to whom the LORD imputes no iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit.

<sup>3</sup> While I kept silence, my body wasted away through my groaning all day long.

<sup>4</sup> For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was dried up<sup>[a]</sup> as by the heat of summer. *Selah*

<sup>5</sup> Then I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not hide my iniquity; I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD," you forgave the guilt of my sin. *Selah*

<sup>6</sup> Therefore let all who are faithful offer prayer to you; at a time of distress,<sup>[b]</sup> the rush of mighty waters shall not reach them <sup>7</sup> You are a hiding place for me; you preserve me from trouble; you surround me with glad cries of deliverance. *Selah*

<sup>8</sup> I will instruct you and teach you the way you should go; I will counsel you with my eye upon you.<sup>9</sup> Do not be like a horse or a mule, without understanding, whose temper must be curbed with bit and bridle, else it will not stay near you.

<sup>10</sup> Many are the torments of the wicked, but steadfast love surrounds those who trust in the LORD.<sup>11</sup> Be glad in the LORD and rejoice, O righteous, and shout for joy, all you upright in heart.

## Gospel Reading

*Luke 15: 1-3, 11b-32*

*Now all the tax collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to him. And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, "This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them." So, he told them this parable:*

*"There was a man who had two sons. The 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. A 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.*

*"When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs. He would gladly have filled himself with the pods that the pigs were eating; and*

*no one gave him anything. But 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! I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands."' "*

*"So 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. Then the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.'*

*"But 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. And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!' And they began to celebrate.*

*"Now his elder son was in the field; and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. He called one of the slaves and asked what was going on. He replied, 'Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has got him back safe and sound.' Then he became angry and refused to go in. His father came out and began to plead with him. But 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. But when this son of yours came back, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fatted calf for him!'*

*"Then the father said to him, 'Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. But 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.' "*

A Word of God that is still speaking,  
Thanks be to God.

## Thoughts about an Imperfect Life and Faith

“We often believe we are the problem.”

We often hear the prodigal son story and much of the time we are placed in the role of the younger son, as a sinner and we see that the father as God.

And that is in part because this is part of a series of stories about lost and found. Today we are going to take this story as a Good Enough story.

Ok, so how many of you are first born children? Me too! And most analysis of first-born children say they follow the rules. And we often get frustrated when those around us (like our younger siblings) don't follow the rules!

Kate Bowler says in our Lent devotional *Good Enough* “We crave rules to follow AND Part of what is strange about rules is that we love them, and we hate them at the same time.”

I will have to be honest this story of the prodigal son, well I struggle with it! Cause I am like the older brother, and I get doing what is right and expected and then we get this younger sibling that is wild and crazy I judge! I don't think the older brother was perfect. He probably complained sometimes about having to work and his father may have given him some slack and a few days off.

But in that moment when his little brother returns to a party, all he could see was he had been following the rules, sacrificing, and no one ever noticed him. No one ever threw a party to say thanks for being responsible and dependable. The older brother wasn't a bad guy. He was justified in how he felt in that moment. If you look at it from his point of view, he felt unappreciated and hurt. Even though he tried to do all the right things all these years it didn't seem to matter.

It wasn't that he wished harm to his brother, it was that in this moment, he didn't understand why the father had to go for an all-out celebration as opposed to a quiet happiness.

His father had a good point though; the eldest son could peacefully rest at night all these years knowing he was provided for. He could look at himself at the end of the day and know he had been honest and hard working. Ultimately, he wouldn't trade that for anything.

Sometimes, when we're on the end of the older brother, we have to step back and realize that we wouldn't have changed the good we've done or the sacrifices we've made for those we love. It's natural to get frustrated and angered at thinking your hard work was pointless. Your hard work isn't pointless though.

If the older brother hadn't stuck around, who knows that his father would have lived to see this day. There are times when embracing mercy has to be a conscious effort on our part. Unfair as it may seem, there are moments where

we have to choose to let go of our anger and what has been done to move forward. In the bigger picture, it creates the thread of hope that weaves through our past and helps us move forward when we think we can't. Who among us doesn't struggle with this... judging others? Or *judging ourselves? And usually, we are our own harshest critics.*

*Like the Prodigal Son* who lives high on the hog and then famine strikes in the land of his dream vacation. And so, he heads home, tail between his legs, expecting that he has lost it all. To his surprise, his extravagant failure is met with extravagant love and grace. We can be pretty hard on ourselves when things don't go as planned. Guilt, shame, and fear of being seen as a failure can leave us wallowing in the pig pen. Our delusions of a "perfect" life keep us disappointed in ourselves. The Truth is, life is a big ole risk every single day and facing whatever each day holds is not only good enough, but worthy of love and grace.

While the younger brother was forgiven, it would probably still continue to weigh on his mind years from this point that he had squandered his inheritance. He will have to work even harder in order to build up of his self-esteem. It is not that the younger brother's life was easier or that he 'got by' with something. I'm sure things didn't magically turn great for him. It is only when we finally come to self-acceptance of who we are, to accept this and to be comfortable in our own skin. Isn't that one of the keys to life?

My friend Bill Johnson (who defines himself as a free-range pastor) defines self-acceptance as "to be done with perfectionism in all its forms. To learn to practice imperfection in all things in life." I've heard it said that in Japanese art when an object like a jar is broken, they fill in the cracks with gold. The brokenness and imperfection are what makes the object even more valuable and beautiful. May we see imperfection in that way in our own lives. As Leonard Cohen said, "Everything has a crack in it, that's how the light gets in."

The story of the prodigal son is a reminder that God continually ask us to forgive ourselves because we are a work in process and life is all about learning and we will never be done learning.

My friend Bill goes on to say "The thought that life is one big experiment, frees me to experiment, explore and have fun. And I am working on doing better, I always want to improve and to learn more for the joy of it rather than having to prove anything to anyone or to get in good with God, but to become fully myself.

What I'm discovering in deeper ways in my life, is the greatest wisdom in life - is to believe, know, experience and soak in the love of God and to allow that love to overflow in my life so that I will love well - others and even myself. It's a powerful truth to realize that God loves and accepts me just as I am, just the

way I am. Grace is to accept the fact of your acceptance by God, no matter what.”<sup>i</sup>

Marcia McFee says of this series, “some preachers have expressed a worry about how the phrase “good enough” might let people off the hook in striving for excellence. I actually think that the larger problem lies in the fear that the mistakes we inevitably make will be “fatal” in some way. So, we stop being creative, we stop pushing boundaries and trying something new because the risk becomes too great. When this happens, we lose our agency for actually getting better because getting better necessarily means we WILL make mistakes until we learn. None of us will be even close to perfect right away at anything. But if we live in an environment where we know we will be loved anyway, we are freer to live fully and more hospitably ourselves.”

One of the reasons we have a confession of sin, what our Good Enough series calls Honest Questions, Compassionate Response in our weekly worship is to remind ourselves that we are not perfect, and God doesn’t expect us to be perfect. What does God expect? That we are honest, that we acknowledge our mistakes and in doing that both corporate and individually we have the opportunity to make things better. That we can let go of the blame and shame when we are not perfect and release that sin, so that we are freer to live more fully into what God has planned for each of us.

One of the other things that Bill shared in a blog post was the *The Other Serenity Prayer* by Eleanor Brown

“God, grant me the serenity  
To stop beating myself up for not doing things perfectly,  
The courage to forgive myself because I’m working on doing better,  
And the wisdom to know that You already love me just the way I am.”  
We are Good Enough!  
AMEN

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<sup>i</sup> <http://billjohnsononline.com/the-other-serenity-prayer/>