

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Today is the last day to order your Easter flowers. Extra order forms are on the counter in the Annex.

Send an Easter card! We have Easter cards available on the counter in the Annex for you to send. Help brighten up someone's Easter!

Easter Sunrise breakfast after worship in the park. We are asking for donations of breakfast items (cinnamon rolls, muffins, pastries, etc.). There is a sign-up sheet on the counter in the Annex. If you have any questions, please contact Jodilynn Parks (724)927-6502.

An Easter Egg hunt will be held outside the church in the parking lot and side yard on April 16, 2022 from 1-3 p.m. Children ages 2-1 are invited to attend. Parents should plan to stay on site throughout the event. This is being organized by Emmett Gill as part of his Eagle Scout project. RSVP jtownspring22@gmail.com by April 8 if you plan to attend.

Worship Leader today: Jennifer Arnett
Organist today: Cindy Loveridge

March Sunday Duties:

Close-Up: Mike Henegan
Counting the Offering: Janeen Mihoci

April Sunday Duties:

Close-Up: Tom Walker
Counting the Offering: Janeen Mihoci

Deacon for March - Linda Lorigan If you know of anyone in the hospital or in need of assistance, please contact Linda at 724-932-5072

Deacon for April - Carol Henegan If you know of anyone in the hospital or in need of assistance, please contact Carol at 724-932-3854.



03/28 Paul Thompson
04/02 Benjamin Lorigan
04/05 James McElhaney
04/06 Abby Good
04/08 Johann Wester
04/11 Emily White



JAMESTOWN PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

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Website: jamestownpres.org

March 27, 2022

Fourth Sunday of Lent

GOD CALLS US TO WORSHIP HIM

Prelude "Agnus Dei" Bizet

Welcome and Announcements

To prepare our hearts and minds for worship, let us observe a moment of silent prayer.

Call to Worship:

One: Sing to the Lord, and praise his glorious name!

All: Proclaim his salvation day after day.

One: Come, all who are burdened and long for forgiveness;

All: Come, all who are weary and long to find peace.

One: Come! For the God of compassion calls us to a new life of hope and purpose in Christ.

**All: We have heard his voice and come into his house.
Let us rejoice, and praise God's glorious name!**

*Hymn “Praise, My Soul, the King of Heaven” #339

Call to Confession:

Trusting in God’s love for us in Jesus Christ,
let us confess our sins to the Lord.

Silent and Personal Confession

Unison Prayer of Confession: **Eternal God, Source of all that is good, we are sorry for all the ways we turn from you. You show us your path, but we prefer to do things our own way. You give us an abundance of good gifts, but we squander them on things with no eternal value. You call us to a life of forgiveness, but we harbor grudges; we feel the pain of our wrong choices, then ask why you did not stop us from stumbling. Forgive our sin and our folly, we pray ... renew in us your Spirit ... and grant us the humility and courage to embrace the new life granted us in Jesus, your only Son and our only Savior. Amen.**

Assurance of Pardon:

One: Hear the good news of the Gospel: Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners. He himself bore all our sins in his body on the cross,

All: that we might be dead to sin and alive to all that is good.

One: In Christ we are forgiven!

All: Let us therefore gladly receive God’s gift of salvation, and live from now on as children of the Light.

*Response of Faith “Gloria Patri”✠

***Affirmation of Faith:**

We believe there is, has ever been, and ever will be, only one God, who created all things. We believe in God’s only Son, Jesus Christ, through whom we are reconciled with God and given new life. We believe in the Holy Spirit, God in us, who assures us of God’s kindness and mercy in Christ, equips us with gifts for the good of Christ’s Church, and who helps us to live godly, joyful and generous lives. We give thanks that God loves us and has called us to carry the good news of His love to a lost and broken world. And we rejoice in God’s promise that Christ shall return in glory to rule all things in righteousness and peace. Amen.

Prayers of the People, ending with the Lord’s Prayer in unison

Our Father, Who art in Heaven, hallowed be Thy Name. Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our sins as we forgive those who have sinned against us. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.

Dedication of our Tithes & Offerings

*Response of Praise “Doxology”

GOD SPEAKS TO US THROUGH HIS WORD

First Scripture Lesson: 2 Corinthians 1:1-5

Time with Young Disciples

Ordination and Installation of Officers

Those to be ordained come forward
ECO Constitutional questions are asked
Laying on of Hands with Prayer.

Second Scripture Lesson: Luke 15: 1-3, 11b-35

Message: “The Tale-Bearer” Pastor Sue Nageotte

GOD SENDS US FORTH TO SERVE

*Hymn “Make Me a Blessing” #473

*Benediction

*Closing Refrain:

*God be with you ’til we meet again; by His counsels
guide, uphold you. With His sheep securely fold you.
God be with you ’til we meet again.*

Postlude “I Will Serve the Lord” Ritter

* Those who are able please stand

“The Tale-Bearer”

2 Corinthians 1:1-5 & Luke 15: 1-3, 11b-32

This morning’s message is based on one of Jesus’ most familiar parables. It’s so familiar, in fact, that I’m not going to read the text itself. As I often do, I’m going to weave the story into my sermon. If this is NOT a story you know, be sure to read it in your own Bible later. But I’ll bet that most of you will recognize it just from the opening lines. We’ll test that theory in a moment. But first, a few verses to set the scene. Luke 15, verses 1 – 3:

Now the tax collectors and “sinners” were all gathering around to hear Jesus. But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, “this man welcomes sinners and eats with them.” Then Jesus told them this parable ...

Which “them” was he speaking to, do you think? Was it to the tax collectors and the sinners? Or was it the Pharisees and the religious experts – the teachers of the law – who didn’t like the fact that Jesus was hanging around with an “undesirable” crowd? Actually, I think he was speaking to all of them. To the clean-cut, respectable God-fearing Jewish church folks, and to the “sinners” too.

In fact, Jesus tells not one, but *three* parables in a row, about things that are lost, then found. A man has 100 sheep, and one goes missing. A woman has ten silver coins and loses one. The sheep is rescued; the coin is found; and in each case, there is great rejoicing. Finally, Jesus tells today’s parable: It begins: “There was a man who had two sons ...” Yes, I can see from your expressions that you know what comes next! It’s such a familiar story that when we hear the first words – “there was a man who had two sons” – we may respond with a sigh – we’ve heard this before -- or even a mental yawn.

The thing is, to the original listeners, this parable of the Prodigal Son would have been shocking on many levels. First of all, it’s outrageous that the younger son comes to the father, demanding to have his share of the inheritance. What does that mean? Well, we know what an inheritance is: money or possessions that come to an heir, when the owner dies. Under Jewish law, the eldest son would receive a double portion, twice the amount, of any other heirs. With two sons, when the father died his property would be divided up two-thirds to the eldest, and one-third to the younger. But the younger son didn’t want to wait; he wanted his portion NOW.

It’s almost unthinkable that the father actually agrees. After all, he has a large household to support. There’s the older son, who might be married with children of his own. There are many servants and hired workers. That’s a big enterprise to keep going. And now, one third of the land, the livestock, the worldly goods – one third, given away.

Then what does the young man do? He converts it all into cash and moves to a far-off country. He has a great time living in the fast lane ... for a while. But when his pockets are empty, a severe famine strikes that land. He quickly discovers that his so-called “friends” only stuck around while he was paying for their pleasures. When the money disappeared, so did his companions. Now he has nothing left, and no one who cares.

There was only thing to do: go to work. He finally manages to find a position working for a citizen of that country – a Gentile. That might have been okay; but he’s given the most disgusting, humiliating job: *feeding pigs*. You see, Jewish people considered pigs to be unclean. I don’t just mean dirty on the outside like mud and manure. I mean, the kind of unclean that affects your soul. On top of all that, his employer fails to pay any wages. He becomes so desperately hungry he would gladly have eaten the pig-food scattered on the ground ... but no one gave him anything.

Finally, Jesus said, he “came to his senses.” Remembering that the workers in his father’s household always had enough to eat, he decided to go home and ask his father to take him on as a hired hand. But when he gets there ... what happens? [encourage responses]

That’s right! His father sees him coming from a long way off – might even have been watching for him -- and his father *runs* to him and *throws* his arms around him and *kisses* him. The son says, “Father, I’ve treated you shamefully – sinned against heaven and against you – and I’m not worthy to be your son any longer.” But the father calls the servants to dress the young man in a fine robe, and put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet -- things a servant wouldn’t have -- and starts up the barbecue for a big party.

[pause] Now remember ... all this time, the Pharisees and religious experts have been listening to Jesus. When they heard how that young man had to feed pigs ... they probably thought, “Good! That’s just what he deserved.” And when they heard he was coming home with his tail between his legs, they probably thought the same thing. He’s treated his father outrageously, ruined not only a fortune but his family’s good name – there ought to be some price to pay, right? But *Jesus* said, the father welcomed him with open arms, even threw him a party! What?!?! That’s outrageous!

Well, Jesus could have stopped there, with the entire household singing and dancing. That’s how the earlier parables ended, isn’t it? When the lost sheep was found and carried home ... when the lost coin was discovered ... the friends and neighbors all rejoiced. Well, this father wants to celebrate, too!

But Jesus now turns our attention to the older son, who’s been out in the fields working. When he gets home he hears a great commotion -- excited voices; music; dancing – and when he finds out what’s going on, he simply *cannot* believe his ears. It makes him angry ... SOOOO very

angry! ... he won't even go into the house. His father comes out to him, pleads with him – and the older brother lets loose with both barrels.

“All these years I’ve been slaving for you,” he said, “and I never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never even gave me a little goat, so I could celebrate with my friends. And when this son of yours -- who has wasted your property on prostitutes – when he comes home, you throw him a party!”

I want to stop there for a moment and ask: How did he know what his brother had been doing? Take that question and tuck it away for now – we’ll come back to it. Maybe that bit about prostitutes was an exaggeration; maybe not. But clearly, the oldest son had some idea of what his little brother had been up to. And now his bitterness, his anger, his hurt feelings came pouring out.

“I’ve been faithful and hard-working and you didn’t even give me a little goat!”

Once again, the father pleads with him:

“Yes, my son, you have always been with me; everything I have is yours. But we had to celebrate, because this brother of yours was as good as dead, but he is alive again and home; he was lost, and is found.”

“We had to celebrate,” said the father to his elder son. But he is also asking a question. Not expressed in words, no, but plainly heard. “Won’t you celebrate with me?” Jesus chooses to leave the question unanswered. It hangs in the air ... between himself, and the Pharisees ... while the tax collectors and other sinners think about it, too.

[PAUSE] Well, as you probably know, this is a story about extravagance. That’s what the word “prodigal” actually means. In the negative sense, it’s about reckless spending and waste. In the positive sense, it’s about lavish generosity and abundance – the extravagant mercy of the father who welcomes his wayward son back home like ... well, like his own dearly beloved, precious child, and not as a servant or slave.

A familiar story, yes. One we know from Scripture, and one we can almost certainly relate to. Maybe not in every particular, but enough that we can see ourselves somewhere in the parable. There are more nuances here, than in the parables of the lost sheep and the lost coin. A coin can’t remove itself from a purse or hiding place. A sheep may wander or even sneak away, but it doesn’t take one-third of its owner’s assets with it!

This parable, though is laden with choices and consequences ... and oh, the tangle of emotions. First, the impatient, insensitive, even callous child who takes what is not really his, goes off and gets into a pile of trouble; later we meet the obedient, hard-working child who stays at home. As events unfold, we recognize the desperate humiliation felt by the younger, and the weight of duty, mingled with resentment, felt by the older. And the father waiting, watching, hoping.

Usually, at this point in sermons we are asked to consider: in what ways are we like the younger sibling, and in what ways are we like the elder? We are asked to appreciate, once again, the way

our heavenly Father has shown extravagant grace to us ... and we are asked to reflect on how we ourselves extend grace to others.

All that is well and good and important. I don't want to diminish those crucial questions. But thinking about this parable, it occurred to me that there's another layer here, that we might profitably consider. There's someone else in this story -- maybe several "someones" -- who aren't named or given a face, but have an important role in events.

Think back with me again to when the older son furiously says "this son of yours" -- of their father -- "this son of yours has squandered your property on prostitutes." How did he know that? How did he know what his brother was up to, in that other country so far away? Obviously, *somebody had to tell him*. There must have been someone who had connections in that distant place, but who also knew the family well enough to recognize the younger son, see what he was doing, and made sure the brother heard about it.

I think of this person as the tale-bearer. The one who carried the story, or stories, back from that far-off land. And I wonder ... I wonder, what kinds of things did the tale-bearer say? What kind of picture was painted? Did the tale-bearer treat it like delicious gossip: "You'll never believe what that greedy fool is doing with your father's money!"

Or, was the tale bearer, instead, acting from concern: "He's gotten in with some really bad company; is there something that could be done to help him?"

And later -- when the young man's money was gone and he was starving -- did the tale-bearer explain about the famine, and how desperately he was trying to stay alive?

Or instead, did the tale bearer paint the picture of someone who no longer gave a rip about his religious faith -- to the point he would work with pigs?

I realize, we've moved away from the text a bit but I think there's relevant life application here. The stories we tell, within families, within communities, have an impact on what happens. And the way we listen to stories ... the questions we ask, our process of discernment about actions we might take ... that has an enormous impact as well.

So, imagine being the brother who stayed at home, listening to a story about your younger brother living it up in a land far away. How will you, as older brother, react? And imagine the tale-bearer was in a position to carry a message of sorts back from you TO your younger sibling. Would the message be, "our father loves you ... WE love you ... and we want you to come home"? Or would the message be, "your family is disgusted by your behavior"? The message makes a difference, doesn't it?

That brings us smack back to our scripture. The sinners and tax collectors have gathered to hear Jesus, and the clean-cut, respectable religious folks don't like it. They don't like the fact that Jesus is hanging out with "bad people" and even eating with them! The Pharisees and teachers of

the law, they thought those unsavory types should be kept at arms-length; far, far away -- metaphorically eating pig-food.

By context, we understand that the tax collectors and “sinners” who have gathered around Jesus, are like the younger brother in the land of famine ... starving for good news and a touch of kindness ... perhaps not fully realizing it yet, but they’ve already begun to turn home, toward the Father who is ready to welcome them.

Jesus has come to them ... come to us ... as *THE Tale-Bearer*. He is the One sent by God with a message -- in words, and in his very flesh -- a message of love and forgiveness. Through him, we know the extent of God’s mercy. And we – his children -- have been given the privilege of sharing that story of God’s mercy and grace.

My prayer for you and for me, is that in all we say, and all we do, we will be faithful to our calling; that we will tell the story rightly, to the praise and glory of our Lord. Amen.