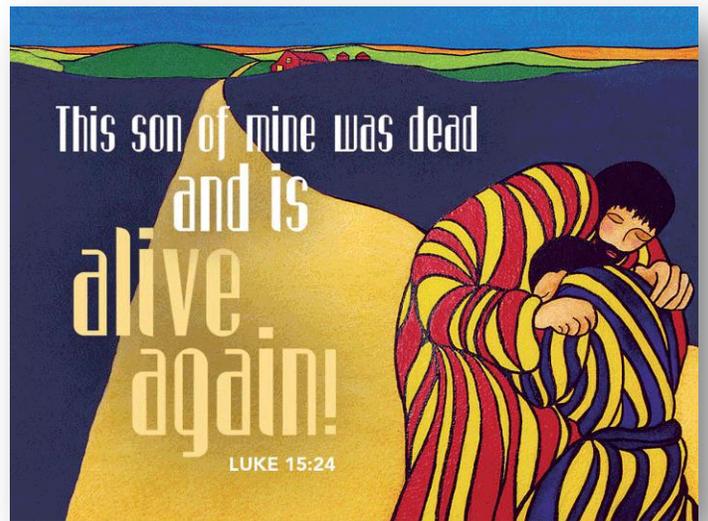


Sermon for Sunday, March 27th, 2022
Lent 4, Year C
Luke 15:1-3; 11b-32
“The Parable of the Prodigal Son”

Maybe like you, we've looked I've looked at a zillion paintings of his classic parable today which appears only in Luke's gospel, and that is the story of the prodigal son. I think Rembrandt probably has the most famous painting of this scene, but there are hundreds of other paintings depicting the famous parable told by Jesus.



And while I've read the story 1 million times, and preached, today this painting by artist Gisele Bauche (right), in my opinion, sums up not only this well known story of the Prodigal Son, but the gospel message as a whole, better than any sermon I could ever give. She has painted a number of other Bible stories with similar style shown in this particular painting, for example the Sermon on the Mount; Jesus healing a paralytic; and Palm Sunday, with Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem. Google her artwork for this and more of her amazing work.

And on our bulletin cover for today we see the father and his wayward Son, the Prodigal Son, meeting on a road, apparently, out, away from the father's home, the son returning home after indulgent living. Notice that the father has gone out to meet the son, away from his dwelling - an act of that would have been very humiliating for any good Jewish father. And not only does the father go out to meet the son, but the text says the father runs to the son, put his arms around him, kisses him - all signs of great sacrifice and an act which, for the father would have been very undignified. Just as Jesus' hanging on the cross in shame and humiliation for our sake was. So here, in this amazing painting, is the complete gospel message.

#1 - Like this family in this gospel story in Luke, we, too, are born into God's family, nurtured, raised. Loved. And all that is God's is ours.

#2 - Because of sin, our sin, we separate ourselves from God and from one another. We set ourselves up as God, and we quickly find that it's a lonely place to be. Because we learn that we are not God. The Prodigal Son learned this the hard way. And even though our journey may not be just exactly like the Prodigal Son's in our gospel today, it is a nonetheless a lonely place to be. Separated from God and from one another.

#3 - On our own, by our own merits, and efforts, we cannot earn, find, or make our way back to God. We are lost, estranged from God and one another. This is a very Lutheran concept. And without God we lose our compass, we die, maybe not literally but we are in essence dead.

#4 - As we wander through life, godless, lost, God's heart is broken. We break God's heart by our wayward behavior. We are distant from God. We are like Israel wandering in the desert, lost, hopeless, relying on our own vices to survive. And we squander what God has freely given us.

#5 - But God finds us, and in Christ, meets us where we are, and welcomes us back, again, and again, and again, with a grace filled welcome. No questions asked, no score of wrongdoing kept. All that is past is past, and nothing can separate us from God's love for us. God's heart is full again. We are welcomed home.

#6 - But there's more to this homecoming. God doesn't just meet us where we are, but comes *out* to meet us, runs after us, finds us, and what Jewish traditions would have been a very humiliating thing to do, and that is to chase after a wayward son, to embrace and kiss him, and welcome him back into the family. This incredible act of love by the father is symbolic of God, coming to us in the person of Jesus Christ, and in a complete act of humiliation offering himself as a sacrifice for humanity. In this ultimate act of shame and humiliation, God meets us where we are, welcomes us home, reconciles us through Christ himself, as Paul says today in his letter. Our disgrace has been rolled away.

In other words God, in the person of Jesus Christ becomes sin itself says Saint Paul, so that we might become the righteousness of God.

What a deal, what a trade! In Jesus Christ, God becomes sin so that we may be reconciled through him, restored as rightful heirs to the kingdom of God. Forgiven 70×7. In other words, forgiven infinitely.

#7 - But here's the thing, God never left us in the first place. God never abandons us. God is never distant from us. Even as Israel wanders in the desert, even as we wander, God is present with us on our journey. This is the gospel message. We are born in the likeness of God, and all that God has is ours, freely given to us. But we squander it away by thinking that we are God ourselves. And we become distant from God and one another...estranged. Separated from God. But even though God's heart is broken by our actions and our deeds God chases after us and finds us and welcomes us and loves us, just as we are.

And in the ultimate act of love, God enters into heal the human realm in the person of Jesus Christ to endure shame, humiliation, and even death itself in order to reconcile us to himself again. And there is no end to the sacrificial giving.

I know that it may sound weird, but I invite you to keep the bulletin cover around your house. Put it on your coffee table. It's a great conversation starter for friends and others. Let it remind you of God's faithfulness to us even when we don't always deserve it. Let it be a reminder, that in Christ God finds us, loves us, and forgives us no matter how lost we may feel. Thanks be to God. Amen!