

Lent Four

03.31.19

Luke 15.1-3, 11-32

“God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us.” [2 Corinthians 5.19]

In the Name of Christ + Jesus our Lord

As Lord's people have been making their way through Lent's Forty Days, this Sunday (Saturday) signals that we have traveled two-thirds of way

While world has been tugging at us to pay attention to realities going on in its life, Father, Son / Holy Spirit have been giving us fresher look / fuller discovery of Life into which they baptized us

On Ash Wednesday we not only spoke long litany of penitence, we also spoke prayer that allowed we are not worthy to come to Lord's Supper on our own

On Sundays that followed we referenced seven historic sins from Church's tradition – pride, greed, lust, envy, gluttony (that is, over-consumption), anger, laziness

We were reminded of 1950s Lutheran public confession that concluded with familiar words of forgiveness but then warned us to take our sins seriously; if we did not, we would remain mired in them

We were exposed to biblical definition of repentance – confronting our sins, confessing them publicly / privately, / receiving Lord's forgiveness

We were also reminded (because of 21st verse from Ps 50) that, when we are participating in seven sins, we should not interpret Lord's silence as sign of his approval concerning our behaviors

While all this fresh look / fuller discovery may have our lives reeling, today's (tonight's) Gospel brings much of this together through Jesus' highly familiar parable of wandering younger son, of his compassionate father / of obedient, yet considerably upset, older son

World keeps insisting that its realities should be priority for Lord's people as we note tragic death of young student in Colleton County or politicians who do not serve as well as they could or recklessness of living only by what we want or desire, but those realities have to give way to dominant reality pulsing through this passage from Luke, actual center of Trinity's Life!

As we work through parable we will see how Lord's forgiveness moves in / around our lives as his baptized people

Context for this passage is set within first three verses of reading

In them Luke reports that Pharisees / scribes are grumbling at Jesus because he welcomes sinners / eats with them!

So our Lord plunges them / us into realities of his Forgiveness

Younger son approaches his father to get advance on property that will be his share one day

Father gives advance to him (we can only speculate on why younger son is making request / why father honors it so readily!)

Over period of time, younger son burns through advance on reckless life style / gets squeezed hard when economic conditions become severe

To support himself, he ends up feeding pigs for income

As he goes about this grinding work, he becomes more / more aware of what he has done with his life

He thinks of people working for his father (it's conceivable their work is not as grinding) / decides to return home

What is striking about this return is that he wants to return as employee, not as son!

While he is unsure of what may happen, he is startled by compassionate embrace of his father!

In response, son confesses his sins, his wrongs / his unworthiness

Father orders up celebration to mark son's return, one that is unleashed by father's compassion

Now, as usual, older son is out in fields working, / hears of celebration; he asks servants what is going on

Their report angers him / he refuses to go in for it

Father pleads with him to be part of celebration

As counter, older son notes his responsible behavior all these years, behavior that apparently never triggered celebration

Older son reminds father of responsibility he exercised for long time in contrast with irresponsibility of his younger brother

Older son expresses his dismay at celebration triggered by return of younger son / explains that he has right to grumble

Father assures older son of his strong connection with him

He reminds older brother that celebration is triggered by son thought dead but now is alive, by son thought lost but now is found!

Let's now see how this parable makes it way into our lives today

There is much of ourselves in both sons, younger / older, as well as in father who is dripping with compassion toward both of their attitudes

Our Lord is relating this parable so we can see Forgiveness that his Father has for all people, reality that set off grumbling by Pharisees / scribes

World in which we live will allow us to pay some attention to Lord's Life, but it will not permit us to plunge into it fully

Instead, it will work hard to dilute or reshape it

How? Remember list of seven deadly sins?

World lets us be aware of such list / will encourage us to avoid doing some of them /, on good day that may occur

But then what happens? World plants idea that because of such avoidance we are better than all those other people who can't avoid those sins!

Then, when we see our Lord's Scriptures / Sacraments being carried into messy lives of those who cannot avoid such sins, we get disgusted with our Lord / mutter about way he does things!

World is delighted when that occurs because it has managed to turn us into grumblers!

Lord God, on other hand, One who re-birthed us with his Life at Baptism, would turn us into forgivers!

His people are well aware of that list of seven sins

Undergirded by his Life, we may even be able to avoid full participation in them

But we will always be aware that we are not better than those who are wallowing in seven sins, we are just more aware of who our Lord is / of Forgiveness he pours into our lives

Then, when we see our Lord's Scriptures / Sacraments being carried into messy lives of such persons, we will applaud our Lord / offer to be reflectors of that Forgiveness

He, along with Father / Spirit, will be delighted because we have been transformed from grumblers into forgivers!

As we let details of this parable cling to our lives this week, recalling both sons / father, note pad from which grumbling launches itself

We grumble because we measure everything by what we think / by what we do!

Note, too, pad from which Forgiveness launches itself

It is measured by what Father of our Lord thinks / does!

Martin Luther, in spelling out impact of Apostolic Creed in Large Catechism, stated that real work of Church is imbedded in Forgiveness of sins

He reminded us that:

- Father loves us without condition as he makes us
- Son loves us in our sin-draped lives so much that he becomes human being to die / rise for us
- Holy Spirit, working through Scriptures / Sacraments, sustains / renews such love on daily basis

Throughout these Forty Days of Lent, our Lord has been calling his baptized people to confront sin in their lives / to be swarmed with his Forgiveness

On all Lenten Sundays we noted that world (through realities of sin, Satan / death) is always trying to con us into thinking that as long as our sins do not approach criminal behavior / or gather public attention, Lord will let us off hook – this is not true!

World then promises that we have abilities to control sin's corrosive / destructive effects – this also is not true!

Remember, Forgiveness of Lord God is not understanding or excusing sin / wrong we do; it takes such sins / wrongs to Son's Cross, imbedding our lives fully in his Forgiveness!

This redemption, in turn, enables us to carry / reflect that Forgiveness to those people whose lives are being warped, tensed / destroyed by realities of world's life!

Now may the peace of the Lord God, which is beyond all understanding, keep our hearts and minds through Christ + Jesus our Lord