

Welcome, Announcements, and Land Acknowledgement

*As we come to worship in Jesus' name we acknowledge with gratitude and respect the Lkwungen people – the Songhees, Esquimalt and WSÁNEĆ – on whose traditional and unceded territory we gather. We commit ourselves to just and respectful relationships within our congregation and our neighborhood.*

➤ *Lord, prepare me to be a sanctuary (repeat)*

Lenten Liturgy

During Lent, we remember that even when we disobey and turn away, we are still loved by God.

**God does not give up on us.**

God breaks our stubbornness and calls us back from our wandering, so we can experience the joy and peace that comes from following Christ.

**May we have the courage to hear, to change and to align ourselves with Christ.**

Let us pray... **Persistent God, help us to listen for your voice. Let us hear what you are saying to us and make us willing to change our ways. Break our resistance, forgive our sins, and call us back to you. In the name of Jesus Christ, our prophet, priest, and king, we pray. Amen**

➤ *Bless the Lord (taize chant)*

PWS&D Sharing    **Halidu's Shop Equips Others in Ghana**

Halidu Dayuma spends his days managing a prosperous and bustling training center in Ghana, where he teaches kente weaving and dressmaking.

When Halidu was just 13 years old, his right leg was amputated after a chronic sore he developed didn't heal. Halidu spent three months in the hospital, recovering and learning how to use his new artificial limb.

During this time, Halidu also enrolled in PWS&D-supported workshops where he learned weaving, tailoring and dressmaking. After graduating, Halidu started his own business teaching other students. So far, he has helped train 44 apprentices.

Halidu is grateful for the program, "I owe the community-based rehabilitation program and all their partners, especially PWS&D in Canada, a great deal of gratitude for contributing positively to my life. I am who I am today because of your generous work and love. God bless you."

Thank you for faithfully responding to Christ's call to care for the vulnerable. Through support for PWS&D, we are helping people overcome barriers that might prevent them from living their most abundant lives.

➤ *In the bulb there is a flower*

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† Prayer for Understanding

**Soften our hearts, O God, as we listen to the words of scripture, so that our hearts may be fertile soil in which you plant your living Word. Amen**

Scripture

**Joshua 5: 9-12**

The LORD said to Joshua, “Today I have rolled away from you the disgrace of Egypt.” And so that place is called Gilgal to this day.

While the Israelites were camped in Gilgal they kept the passover in the evening on the fourteenth day of the month in the plains of Jericho. On the day after the passover, on that very day, they ate the produce of the land, unleavened cakes and parched grain. The manna ceased on the day they ate the produce of the land, and the Israelites no longer had manna; they ate the crops of the land of Canaan that year.

**2 Corinthians 5: 16-21**

From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, we know him no longer in that way. So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!

All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us.

So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

**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.”

This is the word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

### Message

I know people who are not fond of this parable about being lost and found that Amanda read from Luke’s gospel – people who are down right offended by it. I have a friend who sort of cringes when this story is told. She is an accomplished person – well educated, well respected – a responsible, reliable, contributing member of her community. She is the older of two children – the good and loyal and true child. She reacts to this parable because she sees herself as the older brother in the action – the one who is angry and resentful and too proud to come to the party – the one often ignored in our retelling.

Usually, we call this the story of the prodigal son. In our pew bibles it is entitled by the editors “The Parable of the Prodigal Son and His Brother”. That’s better I suppose but Jesus begins

differently, and we need to honour the words of the one who shares the message. He begins by saying, *“There was a man who had two sons.”* This is a story about the man – the father who comes out – the father who rushes to welcome – this is the parable of the extravagant father with two children, both of whom are lost.

*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.”*

As with most stories, the setting is important. We need to know the context to appreciate and understand the drama and conflict to follow. Jesus tells the story in response to the complaining of the Pharisees and the scribes. Much of what we learn from the gospels relates to seeing clearly the contrast between the behaviour of Jesus and the behaviour of his critics. Are we approaching the story as listeners along with the tax collectors and sinners or are we, like my friend, already grumbling along with the Pharisees and scribes?

Jesus was eating with tax collectors and sinners. Over time we have lost the significance of who these people are and the radical action of Jesus. Tax collectors and sinners are not just friendly folk who have been misunderstood. Publicans had taken jobs with the foreign government occupying Israel and made good money collecting taxes from their own people – collaborators with the enemy if you will. Sinners were so named because their offenses had gotten them thrown out of the synagogues – people who were excommunicated – left outside the doors of the community. The fact that Jesus eats with them – accepts them – is intended to be shocking.

The Pharisees are not the villains in this situation. They are the guardians of law and high standards of behaviour – sometimes we take on that role ourselves. They sense the erosive force in not distinguishing between good people and bad people – what we might refer to as “the slippery slope”. After all, doesn’t forgiving look very much like condoning? Are they wrong to question what Jesus is doing? Wouldn’t we do the same? Don’t we do the same all the time?

Into this scene Jesus tells three parables. The first two are short and straightforward stories about a lost sheep and a lost coin – really, they are stories about finding the sheep and finding the coin – stories about joy. These first two stories won’t distress the people too much – they are pretty tame – but our story for today is another matter entirely – everything about it is designed to upset and disturb the listeners.

According to local law and custom the man’s two sons would have been able to live off the family estate during their father’s lifetime, but the property would remain in his hands – under his control – until his death. After the father’s death, the older son would inherit two-thirds of the property, and the remaining third would be divided among the remaining heirs – the younger son in the case of our story. Given this, the younger son’s request to receive his property during the father’s lifetime is all the more irregular and disrespectful – it amounts to treating his father as if he were already dead – wishing him dead.

We know how the story proceeds from here – the young man lives an extravagant life and ends up destitute. He becomes so poor in fact – so low – that he is outside the covenant. Because he is with swine, he is reduced to the status of a Gentile, a nobody. To the original audience then, the contrast to his welcome home is all the more extreme.

Have you ever received a welcome that was more than you expected? I remember that while travelling for PWS&D, we were often welcomed in extravagant style. We would come to a slum, or a Tsunami devastated village, or a Christian hospital struggling to make ends meet and people would appear in great numbers to greet us. A paste of sweet-smelling turmeric would be smeared on our cheeks and a red dot marked on each one's forehead. Or gifts of fabric would be offered. Or incense wafted in our faces. Sometimes we would receive a flower – or a whole garland of flowers, peanuts and fancy ribbon to honour us. It was far more than we expected or deserved – an overwhelming, extravagant welcome.

When the younger son came to himself and returned home, he was received with just such a lavish welcome – beyond all hope and expectation – beyond reason. And this is what is so upsetting to the listeners of the parable as Jesus is telling it. The party is what offends them so much. It is the music and the dancing that set the older son off on his tirade. He has a point you know. Any one of us would agree that the penitent one – the one who left home and came back destitute should be allowed to return. Both Judaism and Christianity provide for the return of sinners – but to bread and water, not fatted calf – to sackcloth, not fancy clothes – to ashes, not jewelry – to kneeling, not dancing – to tears, not merriment. Has the party cancelled the seriousness of sin and repentance? Who among us would attend the party?

Really! It isn't right. Where is justice and fairness? He took his share and wasted it while the other guy worked hard. And don't kid yourself – his return is going to cost more than just the expense of this one feast. I mean, the boy has been totally restored to his place in the family – the estate will be divided again. What is with the father's values?

But this isn't the end of the story. Remember – there was a man who had two sons. He loved two children – went out to both – was generous to both. Perhaps because of the competitive rather than cooperative spirit of our society – perhaps because of our history and experience – but the common expectation is that there must be losers if there are winners. It can be difficult not to think in black and white – either-or terms: Jews *or* Gentiles, poor *or* rich, saint *or* sinner, publican *or* Pharisee, older *or* younger child. We think we need to take sides.

This is the dilemma for my friend. Like most of us, she is the steady and reliable one – the one who can be counted on through thick and thin – the one who feels deserving. And if she is deserving – if we are deserving of the blessings we enjoy – then those who are less faithful must not be. However, the father's response invokes a different value system – one that rejoices in

the presence of both sons. Reminds us that the love the father offers is not given because we deserve it but is simply given by grace.

The embrace of tax collectors and sinners does not mean a rejection of the Pharisees – the reception of sinners is not a rejection of saints. Ours is a “both/and” not an “either/or” God. Such is God’s love, but we find it difficult not to be offended by God’s grace toward another, especially if we question that person’s conduct and character.

Some of us identify with the younger son in this story and some of us feel more connected to the older son. But we need to see that both sons were lost – both were separated from their father – one ran away and returned in humility – the other is still standing outside in the dark listening to the party and smelling the feast. One has received mercy and the other is choosing pride – resisting his father’s embrace. Both loved – both lost – one found – one wrestling with grace. In our heart of hearts, we often struggle with God’s love – grumbling at a love that makes a home for both sons – questioning the extravagance of the father who stands in the doorway, waiting for us all to rejoice in the celebration.

Whoever we are, God is waiting for us to stop being lost. Waiting for us to come home – to take hold of the inheritance of God’s grace. Will we choose to join the party? Will you?

➤ *O Love that wilt not let me go* 209

#### † Offering

The Apostle Paul declared that in Christ there is a new creation. Everything has become new! What new things can God do with the gifts we offer today? With expectant hearts, let us place in God’s hands what we have to offer in Christ’s name.

➤ *Praise God from whom all blessings flow* 306

**We place these gifts into your hands, O God. Bless them with your transforming grace so that they may become seeds springing up with new life in the world you love. Fill our hearts with that same grace so we can bring hope to weary and worried lives in Jesus’ name. Amen**

#### † Pastoral Prayers and the Lord’s Prayer

Gracious God, you have called us together as your people, to be the church of Jesus Christ. Make us one in faith and discipleship, breaking bread together, and telling the good news, so that the world may believe you are love, turn to your ways, and live in the light of your truth. Faithful God, embrace us with your hope.

Creator God, you made all things and called them good. We pray for the earth in its vulnerability, depleted by our lifestyle choices and our economic expectations. Inspire reverence for the earth in all people. Guide us all to make wiser choices for the sake of your creation. Help us use

resources wisely, with future generations in mind, guarding the fragile balances you have set between many precious species. Faithful God, embrace us with your hope.

Jesus Christ, Prince of peace, you taught us of God's reconciling grace in the story of a father who welcomed back his wandering son and invited his jealous son to open his heart. Speak to the hearts of all your people in this time when so many neighbours and nations sit in judgment of each other, provoking conflict and resentment. Teach us how to seek peace on earth together. Call those in positions of power and influence to work for the common good. Turn us away from anger, fear, violence or vanity, which can turn neighbour against neighbour and nation against nation. May all who claim your name be known as makers of the peace. Faithful God, embrace us with your hope.

O Christ, healer of hearts and hopes, you desire health and wholeness for each one of us. Grant rest and renewal to all who are broken in body, mind or spirit, and bring comfort and hope to all who face loss and loneliness. In silence we lift before you the names of those on our hearts today...

Faithful God – Spirit of power and promise – embrace us with your hope so that we may live faithfully, encouraging each other by the commitment we see in Jesus Christ who encourages us to pray together ...***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 debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen***

➤ ***Help us accept each other***

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### Blessing

Get ready to go well. On the good days give thanks to God – on the bad days, give thanks to God. Think neither too highly of your successes nor put yourself down for your failures. You are a child of God – sufficiently beautiful and sufficiently flawed to receive the costly grace of Jesus Christ. Go your way with a resilient and cheerful spirit – and may the grace of the Risen Christ, the love of God and the nurturing community of the Holy Spirit fill us all.

➤ ***Go now in peace (round)***

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