

January, Year One
Reflection One

Church Calendar – Lent
8th Day Value – Incarnational Community
Life Practices (Spiritual Disciplines) – Prayer

The Parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15) The Youngest Son

A “parable” is a story. These stories are one of the most powerful ways that Jesus taught His disciples, and this is how He teaches us today. Parables employ a whole range of themes that add to their richness, and this is certainly true with the Parable of the Prodigal Son found in Luke chapter 15. This chapter is really a trilogy of parables beginning with the shepherd and the “lost sheep,” then the woman and the “lost coin,” and ending in the “lost son.” Suffice it to say that leading up to the story of the Prodigal Son, Jesus is likening Himself and the Kingdom of God to the good shepherd who saves even the one, and the woman who searches her house for the lost coin and rejoices! In these reflections, you will become familiar with many themes with which the richness and the genius of the Parable of the Prodigal Son confronts us, as well as the main characters of this story – the youngest son, the oldest son, and the father. The first three months of reflections will begin to describe these three characters and how their stories sound very much like our own.

How old do you think the youngest son is in this story? Jesus never told us. He left that to the imagination of the hearer (for us, the readers). What is the relationship between the youngest son, the father and the older brother before the story begins? What was Jesus thinking when he started the story at this point in the life of the three characters? What is the context of the story? What is going on in the Gospel, the Biblical narrative in Jesus’ public ministry? As you begin to immerse yourself in this parable and to ask some of these questions, you will – no doubt – have many more. This is part of what it means to engage your imagination in the story, not to make things up that are not there, but to engage more than just your rational mind. We need to engage our whole being into the stories of how God redeems his people.

Jesus weaves a magnificent tale, a story of breadth and of depth, challenging the religious status quo. He begins by describing the shocking opening scene of the youngest son asking his father for his share of the inheritance. This was a punishable act, an act of disrespect and shame toward the father and the whole village. After acquiring the money, the youngest spends all he has (hence the word *prodigal* which in this case means *extravagant*, in the context of spending). After hunger almost kills him, he is poor and desperate and contrives a confession in order to return to his father as a hired hand. He is at his wits’ end, at the bottom.

But the welcoming arms of the father surprise him. His father embraces him, clothes him, and celebrates his return with the whole village. It is grace that the son does not expect, coming in ways that surprise and perhaps even shock him. The father returns

to him the signet ring, showing that he has restored to him the status of a son in the household. His father also gives him the best robe of protection and responsibility, as well as new sandals which signify that he is a freeman and not a bound servant or slave. The youngest is alive again in his father's eyes, whose son was as good as dead. The youngest is found when it once seemed he was lost forever. He has returned home to his father and is the honored guest in the midst of celebration.

This is the best news for all people who find themselves like the youngest son, people who have wandered far into foreign lands to squander life on their own idols. The youngest son is the consummate "sinner." People have written songs, poems, and books about him. He is the character in this story with whom we most easily identify.

Some of the people listening to Jesus tell this story were people that most of the religious leaders disdained as outcasts and 'sinners' (the lame, blind, lepers, prostitutes, Gentiles, women, etc...). These people must have gasped for air. Jesus was saying that they were the younger son and that God loved, accepted, and embraced them. What hope this must have given them. What hope this gives us!

As we embark on this two-year journey of monthly reflections called *Coracles*, further towards the heart of God's love and grace, let us be prayerful and vigilant. This will be a wonderful adventure as the Lord reveals aspects of our lives that come to light as a direct result of reading, studying, and hearing what Jesus says, as well as hearing what we all are learning as we travel together. We will live in this story of the Prodigal Son and the first part of the Beatitudes in the (Sermon on the Mount) for this first year. During the second year we will delve into the Parable of the Good Samaritan and the remaining Beatitudes. The grand story of redemption turns out to be our story too, grafted into Jesus along the long road of formation. Jesus' story is one of grace, of love, of courage, and of homecoming. May God's blessings be with us on our sojourn together!

Readings

Gospel Reading – The Gospel of Luke

- For this first month, read the entire book of Luke, spending some concentrated time in Luke chapter 15 – especially the Parable of the Prodigal Son. Remember to read slowly and prayerfully; pray for the Holy Spirit to reveal fresh insights that settle in the heart and mind.

Old Testament Readings

- Read Exodus 20:1-21 – these are the Ten Commandments given to Moses and to Israel, sometimes called the Law of Moses.
- Read Psalm 23 – this Psalm is the "Great Shepherd" psalm: something Jesus is referring to in the opening parable of Luke 15.

New Testament Readings

- Read Matthew 22:34-38 – this passage describes Jesus’ commands to love God and neighbor in the freedom found of following Jesus, thus fulfilling and surpassing the Law of Moses.
- Read Ephesians 2:1-10 – this is the Apostle Paul’s teaching on God’s grace and how we cannot earn God’s favor. It is totally a gift of love.

Questions and Reflections

- In what ways has-or is-your journey similar with the *Younger Son’s* journey in the parable?
- The 8th Day Community’s first value describes *Incarnational Community*. This means we “flesh-out” Jesus’ love for humankind’s brokenness by caring for and living with the marginalized and oppressed and concerned and active in the causes of justice. How is Jesus challenging through this parable to live more like Him, to be nurtured by Him?
- *Celtic Christianity (and the many streams of the Church throughout Church history) loved the Bible* and the story of renewal and restoration we are all invited to share in. They also loved to memorize large portions of it and described their experiences often in poetry, art, and song. How do you best express your love for the stories of Scripture?
- *This winter season of “Nurturing” focuses on Lent*, the forty days of preparation before Easter. Beginning on Ash Wednesday, Lent is a time of giving up something or fasting. How do the Beatitudes relate to the season of Lent, the Cross and Resurrection?
- *Life Practices #1 (spiritual disciplines) (first year) – Prayer*. This season we practice and emphasize *Prayer*. Praying is dialogue with God, sitting in silence to listen, talking with God in our favorite places of worship and beautiful places of meaning to us. We may pray as a group, corporate gatherings or during special calls to prayer and intercession. We may pray the *Daily Office* and/or *Complines* in the evening and center that time in the Church lectionary with the help of a prayer guide such as the *Book of Common Prayer*, *Celtic Daily Prayer* or other helpful guides. Prayer is praise to God, an intimate meeting of love and of wonder, bathed in mystery. It is important to keep in mind that daily prayer – prayer at all times and in all places – can help us see Jesus in the most ordinary of circumstances. Prayer is a creative gift to be used and grown within community. We also commit to a daily rhythm of prayer as we confront the evils of our times and the opportunities provided to us for witness (Matthew 6:9-14).
- *Quotes to Ponder:*
“By this light I shall come to know that you, eternal Trinity,
are table, and food and waiter for us.”

Catherine of Sienna, Fourteenth century Dominican nun,
Engraving in the ‘Prayer Grotto’ of the Ignatian Chapel, Seattle University

Personal Reflections

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