

March 30 Worship
4th Sunday in Lent
Greeters- Linda Stacy,
Readers- Caleb Simmons, Wayne Stacy

Announcements/Joys-

Time Of Quiet Meditation- *“Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.”* Psalm 32:1

Opening Scripture- Joshua 5:9-12(page 189)

Opening Chorus- 116- God Is So Good

Responsive Call To Worship-

Leader: Return to the Lord your God.

People: For God is gracious.

Leader: Confess to the Lord your God.

People: For God is merciful.

Leader: Repent to the Lord your God.

People: For God is slow to anger.

Leader: Praise the Lord your God.

People: For God abounds in steadfast love.

Leader: Worship the Lord your God.

People: Together, let us worship God!

Hymn- 227- Down At The Cross

Unison Prayer- Our hearts are blessed as we gather before You today, O Lord, for you have given us freedom from all our transgressions and joy in exchange for heavy hearts. You are the refuge we seek when we are troubled and the courage we need when we venture into our days. Bless us today with Your steadfast love as we declare our trust in You. We pray as You taught us, saying...*Lord's Prayer...*

Gloria Patri- Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost.
As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be,
World without end. Amen, Amen.

Old Testament Scripture- Psalm 32(page 480-481)

Special Music-

Gospel Scripture- Luke 15:1-10(page 908-909)

Children's Time/Echo Prayer/Passing of the Peace

Hymn- 473- Cleanse Me

New Testament Scripture- 2 Corinthians 5:16-21(page 1006)

Message

“The Price Of Forgiveness”

We are now past the halfway point in Lent. The special time known as Holy Week are fast approaching and we are not prepared for any of it. This period of Lent is meant to be a time of fasting, repentance and reflection on our sins, not a very joyous group of items to think about. As a matter of fact, Lent can be a bit of a downer when it comes to religious holidays. 40 days of contemplating our shortcomings is not a good way to build up our self-esteem. I am sure that we can bury ourselves in how we fail to live up to God's expectations and trying to figure out a way to show how sorry we are can take up a lot of time. So, how about we stop the pity party and find a way to put a positive spin on this depressing time.

The parable that follows the gospel reading this morning is one that fall within the many verses selected for reading during Lent. This is the parable of the prodigal son; “And he said, ‘There was a man who had two sons; and the younger of them said to his father, ‘Father, give me the share of property that falls to me.’ And he divided his living between them. Not many days later, the younger son gathered all he had and took his journey into a far country, and there he squandered his property in loose living. And when he had spent everything, a great famine arose in that country, and he began to be in want. So he went and joined himself to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he would gladly have fed on the pods that the swine ate; and no one gave him anything. But when he came to himself he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired servants have bread enough and to spare, but I perish here with hunger! I will arise 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 as one of your hired servants.’” And he arose and came to his father. But while he was yet at a distance, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. And 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 servants, ‘Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet; and bring the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and make merry; for this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.’ And they began to make merry. “Now his elder son was in the field; and as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing. And he called one of the servants and asked what this meant. And he said to him, ‘Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has received him safe and sound.’ But he was angry and refused to go in. His father came out and entreated him, but he answered his father, ‘Lo, these many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command; yet you never gave me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends. But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your living with harlots, you killed for him the fatted calf!’ And he said to him, ‘Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. It was fitting to make merry and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found.” (Luke 15:11-32)

This parable shows the happiness and joy that can come from repentance and forgiveness. The son sinned against his father, he repented of his sin, he was willing to take whatever punishment his father gave out. His father was so overjoyed to have his son back, he gave a great feast to welcome him home even though it upset the older brother who thought it was all unfair. All in all, if we look beyond the sin, we find a reason for joy and celebration.

It has been my experience that Lent has been a time for regret and fixation on sins we are guilty of and must be taken care of. We take our sins and we become so obsessed with them that it is difficult to see beyond the negative. During this season, we are called to acknowledge our shortcomings, have a deeper understanding of the gospels, and repent. I think we need to add something else to the mix, joy and appreciation. Forgiveness, both received and granted, is meant to bring a sense of release to our spirit. Remember back when you first accepted Christ and the feeling inside of you when you understood that you had been forgiven of your sins, past, present and future? This feeling, or awareness, should fill your spirit each and every day. Of course, in order to feel this way, we must ask to be forgiven each and every day. After all, we do tend to sin without really thinking about it. It doesn't take much of our time, just admit and ask.

I know that I speak a lot regarding forgiveness, but it is a major part of God's love. Forgiveness in the Bible is a release or dismissal of something. When we receive it from Christ, it is the release of sinners from God's justifiable penalties and the complete dismissal of all charges against us. Beyond our own forgiveness, forgiving others may seem to many of us to be like a weakness or allowing an undeserving person to win. In our faith, it has no connection to weakness or emotion. It is an act of the will. Remember the free will that God has given us? It includes doing things we may not like at the time. Forgiveness, given by us to others or by God to us, is a deliberate act of love, mercy and grace. Is that not something to be joyful about?

I ask for us to all stop this obsession with our sin. Yes, we all do sin and it is a major task to overcome sometimes. The fact is that we have been forgiven, not that we should use that as an excuse to keep on doing the same things again and again, but we need to be aware of our propensity for sinning. Finding a release for our transgressions is as simple as acknowledgment, Repentance, and praising God. This Lenten season does not end with the death of our Savior on the cross, it ends with His glorious resurrection from the tomb. On Easter morning, we will rejoice and proclaim; Hallelujah, Christ is risen. For all who are followers of Christ, our debt has been paid in full and we have been redeemed. So, why feel so down during this period of Lent? There is a day of glory coming for us and the entire world. Look forward to it with joy. Praise Be to God. Amen.

Prayers of People/Prayer-Holy and Gracious God, You the one of prodigal grace. We give you thanks for the gift of life and for the blessings of this life, for family and friends and love abundant. Lead us through the trials the suffering and sorrow the challenges and struggles the tired time, despair and bleak places, back to you, and love abundant. Be with those who weep or cannot sleep who have no peace who seek release and comfort them with love abundant. Fill us with hope, sustained in your mercy, with patience and stamina upheld by your Holy Spirit in your prodigal grace. Transform us and all our broken ways transforms us that we can be made whole and in wholeness may we be the hands and heart of Christ. Amen.

Closing Hymn- 225- When I Survey The Wondrous Cross

Benediction- Whatever wilderness the Spirit has brought you to: walk in boldness, as a beloved child of God walk in peace, under the shelter of the Most High walk in faith, knowing Christ walks with you. Amen.