2nd Sunday in Lent

10 A. M. Worship for Sunday, March 5, 2023

First Memorial Presbyterian Church of Dover, New Jersey

***Gathering and Focusing*** *(During which we prepare our hearts to worship God.)*

***The Call to Worship:* - Rachel Persenaire**

One: In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

All: **Amen.**

One: O Lord, rebuke me not in your anger, nor discipline me in your wrath.

All: **Be gracious to me, O Lord, for I am languishing;**

**heal me, O Lord, for my bones are troubled.**

One: My soul also is greatly troubled. But you, O Lord—how long?

All: **Turn, O Lord, deliver my life; save me for the sake of your steadfast love.**

One: For in death there is no remembrance of you; in ‘Sheol who will give you praise?

All: **I am weary with my moaning; every night I flood my bed with tears;**

**I drench my couch with my weeping.**

**My eye wastes away because of grief; it grows weak because of all my foes.**

One: Depart from me, all you workers of evil,

for the Lord has heard the sound of my weeping.

All: **The Lord has heard my plea; the Lord accepts my prayer.**

**2023 Amazing Grace Theme Verse for 2nd Sunday in Lent:**

***It was fitting to celebrate and be glad, for this your brother was dead,***

***and is alive; he was lost, and is found.*** *Luke 15:32*

***Praise Song: (See last page)* - Rachel Persenaire**

“Amazing Grace (My Chains Are Gone)” - Tomlin/Newton/Giglio

***Confession and Absolution:***

One: A son received a generous inheritance, but wasted it all in sinful living.

He acknowledged his sin and returned in humble repentance, seeking his father’s mercy.

Our gracious heavenly Father has given us so much,

but we too have misused his gifts and wasted what we have received.

Humbly repenting our sins, we ask his forgiveness.

All: **Heavenly Father,**

**we confess that we are not always thankful for the gifts we have received,**

**the gifts of family, home, work and friends.**

**Daily we choose to follow paths that may lead us away from you,**

**the pathways of our own desires.**

**We turn away from your will and your Word.**

**Have mercy on us and forgive us for the sake of Jesus,**

**who took up the path of the cross for us.**

One: The father welcomed his wayward son and celebrated his return, saying,

“My son was dead, and is alive again, he was lost, and is found.”

God our heavenly Father has had mercy on us,

showering us with his grace through Jesus,

who suffered the penalty of death for our sins.

I announce to you that your sins are forgiven

in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

***Prayer of the Day:***

One: Heavenly Father, in Jesus’ parable, the father showed grace to his lost son,

welcoming his son home even though he did not deserve such a welcome.

You showed your grace to us when we were lost and dead in sin.

You sent your only Son to seek and to save the lost.

You are our Father and, in Christ, you welcome us back to yourself,

forgiving our sins for Jesus’ sake.

So many people are still lost in the darkness of sin.

Empower us with your Spirit to share with them the good news that

Jesus died to save them and that you are eagerly waiting to welcome them home.

Hear our prayer in Jesus’ name. Amen.

***Children’s Message*** **- Megan Berg**

***Sung Prayer for Illumination:***  - Harry D. Clarke, 1924

“Into My Heart”

Into my heart, into my heart, Come into my heart, Lord Jesus;

Come in today, come in to stay, Come into my heart, Lord Jesus.

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***Old Testament Lesson: Joel 2:12-13***

“Yet even now,” declares the Lord, “return to me with all your heart,

with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning;

and rend your hearts and not your garments.”

Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and merciful,

slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and he relents over disaster.

***Gospel Lesson: According to Luke 15:11-32***

And (Jesus) 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 is coming to me.’

And (the father) divided his property between them.

Not many days later,

the younger son gathered all he had and took a journey into a far country,

and there he squandered his property in reckless living.

And when he had spent everything, a severe famine arose in 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 into his fields to feed pigs.

And he was longing to be fed with the pods that the pigs ate, and no one gave him anything.

“But when he came to himself, he said,

‘How many of my father’s hired servants have more than enough bread,

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 still a long way off,

his father saw him and felt 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 fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate.

For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.’

And they began to celebrate.

“Now his older 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 these things meant.

And (the servant)said to him, ‘Your brother has come,

and your father has killed the fattened calf,

because he has received him back safe and sound.’

But (the older son) was angry and refused to go in.

His father came out and entreated him, but he answered his father,

‘Look, these many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command,

yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might celebrate with my friends.

But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your property with prostitutes,

you killed the fattened calf for him!’

And (the father) said to him, ‘Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours.

It was fitting to celebrate and be glad,

for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found.’”

One: The Word of the Lord.

All: **Thanks be to God!**

***Meditation: “Grace for the Lost”***

One: Jesus befriended sinners and tax collectors.

These are the kinds of persons one would find on the very margins of society.

They are not the type you would generally invite home.,

Indeed, many would not even wish to be seen with them.

But Jesus held table fellowship with them, welcoming them to a meal in his presence.

That means he would go to the margins of society to find them … to be with them.

And by exceeding these societal boundaries, even in this lonely place,

he extended God’s amazing grace to those who were so disgraced and lost.

Scribes and Pharisees, witnessing these events, said about Jesus,

“This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them.”

We can even imagine them saying this with a disapproving frown, or a scorning scowl.

But had these religious leaders forgotten about God’s abundant grace to them

as children of Israel?

If God did not leave his own people in despair,

why should such grace be denied to those on the margins of life?

Yet there is plenty of that kind of self-righteous legalism present today.

You can find it even in many a church-goer.

Lent is a time for us to fess up to that.

We tend to limit grace, putting up loveless barriers of critical distance toward others.

Jesus, however, offers grace to both sinners as well as the wayward self-righteous.

Jesus tells parables about incredible and celebrative grace for all who are lost,

even for those who are not aware of their own lostness.

And the punchline is always the same:

“Rejoice with me, for that which was lost is found!”

One of his most renowned parables tells about two children

who were deeply loved by their father.

Both were lost, but were also found by their father who searches for them,

and would gladly give anything for their lives.

The first of these children we come to know through the parable is the younger son.

We know him by another name, the prodigal son.

All: **“Father,…”**

One: Notice the first word this younger son uses

is already a sign of where he stands in the household.

He is no slave. He is no hired hand who has no place to seek help or make demands.

His life is not controlled by the whims of an uncaring employer.

He is a child of the father.

And as such, he trusts that his father will hear him, no matter what.

Indeed, this younger child, in every one of his speaking engagements to the father,

speaks to him with the same trust that his father is a loving parent.

So, he will always begin with the same word, “Father”—not simply as a

biological comment, but as a word with the expectation that he will be heard.

It is not all that dissimilar to us, when we pray, “Our Father, who art in heaven.”

It is because of the grace of the Child of God, Jesus the Christ,

that we are invited to pray this way.

Jesus has brought us into a loving and promising relationship with God.

As Luther said, when we call God “Abba, Father” in prayer,

we trust that “with these words God wants to entice us,

so that we come to believe he is truly our Father and we agree truly his children,

in order that we may ask him boldly and with complete confidence,

just as loving children ask their loving father.”

Our faith dares to trust that this Father will listen to us; and whatever we ask of him,

and he will always hear us and hold us in his parental love.

That loving heart of the father will be important for this younger child

as his story progresses.

For the father’s love and endearment is the first grace that comes to this child,

and will always be with him—even as our Father’s love is with and for us.

All: **“Father, give me the share of the property that will belong to me.”**

One: But what is this that the younger son asks?

He asks for his share of the property.

He asks for his inheritance, something that WILL belong to him.

This is a grace that is set for the future.

But this child asks for it now, already, in the present.

Still, it is not that different when we pray to OUR Father, to ask him for things now,

in the present.

“Give us this day our daily bread.”

God our Father, of course, does give it to us, and not only to us, but to all,

“even to all evil people,” and even without our asking for it!

But Luther then went on to explain, “we ask in this prayer

that God cause us to recognize what our daily bread is

and to receive it with thanksgiving.”

Did this younger son ask his father with that kind of awareness of thanksgiving? Do we?

The inheritance in biblical times, much like it is today, is a gift,

a grace, that usually comes to one after the father has died.

Occasionally, however, one might receive their inheritance in advance,

however embarrassingly presumptuous it may be to ask for it.

Nonetheless, when it comes to inheritances,

siblings have been known to quibble about their “fair share.”

They often forget that whatever they receive

is already a grace they themselves never earned.

And there is no thanksgiving in demanding one’s fair share.

We have no doubt heard more than one child use similar demanding words, “give me,”

when speaking to a parent.

Sometimes the child may hastily shorten this demand to just one word, “Gimme.”

Moreover , the same child, when examining what the other children receive,

may also say, “That’s not fair!”

We see this same pattern among these two brothers in Jesus’ parable.

Both want what the father has, and they want it distributed fairly.

The younger child asks for his share of the property.

He probably already knows that

his fair share many not be as great as the elder child will receive.

But he still wants it now.

What is remarkable is that the father graciously hears him and gives it to him

without question.

Moreover, the father also gives the share to the elder son,

even though the elder son did not even ask for it.

Still, both receive this grace from the father, already, now.

What will these two sons now do with the gift they have received?

Do they thank their father?

Will they go on trusting the father?

How will they use what they have received?

Are their lives touched as loving children, or does their own selfish desire

replace any deep awareness or incentive to thank the father who has given them so?

Here is where their story now darkens.

We see how far the children are lost—lost not only to their own greed and desires,

but lost also to the father.

Still, the father keeps a watchful, waiting, and caring eye upon his children,

and his heart is never diminished.

He will not give up on either of them.

The younger son changed his property into cash,

and then goes on to live in a distant country,

where he squanders everything that he has received.

It is because of that squandering that we come to know this younger son as the prodigal.

What we also learn about him is that he squandered it all “in dissolute living”—that is,

in a reckless lifestyle without any sense of moral decency or faithful responsibility.

We are not told exactly what he did—that is left to our imagination.

Later, we will hear from the elder son who will fill in the blanks

of what HE thought this immoral life must have been.

But might this more accurately depict the kind of immorality already existing

in the desirous heart of the elder son?

In any event, the money is gone, and the younger son is left, as we say, “on his own.”

What will he do now that this grace from the father has been wasted away,

leaving him “dis-graced”?

The first thing he does is to go find a job.

But now, he is not a child, just a slave and a hired hand.

And he works for a boss who cares little about him,

and gives him a most demeaning job, “feeding the pigs.””

Not the kind of thing one wants to put on their resume.

What’s more, from his growling stomach he can tell that

even the pigs seem to be eating better than he is.

It is then that he hears the call of grace from a distant homeland.

All: **“How many of my father’s hired hands have bread enough and to spare,**

**but here I am dying of hunger!”**

One: The younger son’s faith in that grace

does not nearly grasp the great surprise that waits him.

Nonetheless, he trusts that his father was a man of grace,

even for the least and most disgraced of all beings.

We, too, may cry out to God in our weakness, even with our weak faith.

And even in the very depths of our own pigsty,

we dare to trust that our Father in heaven will hear us.

Luther once said that even the sigh of those who put their trust in Christ,

who meekly call out “Abba! Father!” in the weakness of their faith, will be heard.

“Then the Father says: ‘I do not hear anything in the whole world except this single sigh,

which is such a loud cry in MY ears that it fills heaven and earth

and drowns out all the cries of everything else.”

Our Father hears our sighing prayer,

and has a heart big enough to cover all our disgrace.

All: **“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.’“**

One: This prodigal has crafted his confession in advance.

He dares to trust that the father will not turn him away.

But he also thinks that he can no longer be considered worthy of sonship,

and must now spend his days like any common worker.

Nonetheless, at least the work will not be in a distant country,

but in a place nearer the father.

Still, he underestimates the father’s grace.

For while he is yet a far-off distance away from home,

his father sees him; and with a heart full of compassion and mercy,

the father runs to him and embraces him in his arms.

When we pray the prayer our Lord encouraged us to pray,

we ask for forgiveness for the sins we have done.

“Forgive us our sins…”

We don’t deserve forgiveness; and we can never earn forgiveness.

All we truly have coming to us as sinners is the judgment for our sins.

But our Lord went to great lengths to make forgiveness as that which we receive.

And in that deep embrace of forgiveness, we are loved and healed.

All: **“Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you;**

**I am no longer worthy to be called your son.”**

One: While being hugged by his father, the prodigal starts his confession of sin.

Notice that the prodigal never gets around to saying,

“I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands.”

The father will have none of that talk.

He has already made up his mind what he will do

—and all for the gracious good of this prodigal, his younger son.

All the joys and privileges of sonship are completely restored, and in great abundance.

The father will spare no expense.

“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!”

The grace of God’s love is a grace far beyond our limited and limiting imagination.

Our Lord Jesus the Christ came looking for us and welcomed us into his presence.

Christ considers us his friends.

He sits and dines with us in all our lostness,

healing and restoring us into the fullness of God’s grace.

And what does the Father in heaven have to say to all this?

“Any friend of my Son’s is a friend of mine!

Welcome into the joy of my kingdom! Let’s celebrate!”

Remember the reprise from earlier: “Rejoice with me, for that which was lost is found!”

But not all come to the celebration.

The elder son has been out in the field.

He asks about what all is going on from a servant.

This servant echoes the father’s gracious heart

as he answers the inquiry of the elder brother: “You brother has come, and

your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has got him back safe and sound!”

But celebration is far from the mind and heart of this elder brother.

When the father comes and even pleads with him to celebrate this moment of grace,

the response of the elder brother is filled with anger and scorn.

“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!’

WOW. Even the younger son, in all his prodigality,

had the good graces at least to refer to his father more respectfully.

But the heart of the elder son is a lot like the self-righteous legalists we noted earlier,

who said to Jesus: “This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them.”

The elder son seeks to keep his distance from the father,

even though the father goes out of his way

to eliminate such distance for both of his children.

Worse, the elder son thinks of himself as one “working like a slave.”

There is no joy for him. There is no grace IN him.

Yet, even for this one, the father will not give up.

And he even speaks now to this elder son of his with a most compassionate word,

calling him, “Child.”

It is an incredibly tender word, and inviting word,

a word of relationship that cannot be displaced by any disgraceful behaviors.

“Child, 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.”

How many of us, even in our most adamant ways,

would not welcome to hear such kindness.

“Child, you are always with me?”

So, this father, like our own Father in heaven, invites us to come and celebrate.

Perhaps even the elder son’s younger brother,

restored to his grace and dignity in the household through the abundant grace of God,

might also plead with the father’s heart.

So also do we, as those who ourselves forgiven in grace,

changed from disgraced to children of the heavenly Father

through our Lord Jesus Christ—we also forgive others as we have been forgiven.

“Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.”

Grace is so amazing for us that we become witnesses of that grace

in forgiving our critics—critics who are themselves

disgraced by their criticism of God’s loving grace and the good news!

As Luther explains, when we trust that God “would give us all things by grace,”

so “we, too, truly want to forgive heartily and to do good gladly

to those who sin against us.”

Even former prodigals echo our Lord’s punchline in their own joyous reprise.

All: **“’Rejoice with me, for that which was lost is found!**

***Call for the Offering and Prayer of Dedication***

***Choir Anthem:*** “Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus” - Lemmel

***Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper:***

***Invitation***

***Consecration***

***Consummation***

***Appreciation***

***Joys and Concerns***

***Prayers of and for the People and Lord’s Prayer:***

One: …Gracious Lord.

All: **Have mercy on us and hear our prayer…**

One: Amen.

All: **Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name…**

***Standing Hymn of Humility:***  - John Newton, 1779

“Amazing Grace”

1. ***Amazing grace, how sweet the sound, That saved a wretch like me!***

***I once was lost, but now am found, Was blind, but now I see.***

1. **‘Twas grace that taught my heart to fear, And grace my fears relieved;**

**How precious did that grace appear The hour I first believed!**

1. **Through many dangers, toils, and snares, I have already come;**

**‘Tis grace has brought me safe thus far, And grace will lead me home.**

1. **The Lord has promised good to me, His word my hope secures**

**He will my shield and portion be As long as life endures.**

1. **When we’ve been there ten thousand years, Bright shining as the sun.**

**We’ve no less days to sing God’s praise Than when we’d first begun.**

***Responsive Benediction:***

One: For by grace you have been saved through faith.

And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God,

not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

All: **For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works,**

**which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.**

One: Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times in every way.

The Lord be with you all.

All: **Amen.**

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* The majority of the liturgy is by Carol Geisler and the entirety of the Meditation is by Michael Hoy.
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**THE NEXT LORD’S DAY CELEBRATION OF THE SACRAMENT OF HOLY COMMUNION WILL BE ON PALM SUNDAY APRIL 2, 2023.**

**PRAISE SONG**

**“AMAZING GRACE (MY CHAINS ARE GONE)”** -Tomlin/Newton/Giglio

**Verse 1**

Amazing grace how sweet the sound  
That saved a wretch like me  
I once was lost but now I'm found  
Was blind but now I see

**Verse 2**

'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear  
And grace my fears relieved  
How precious did that grace appear  
The hour I first believed

**Chorus**

My chains are gone I've been set free  
My God my Savior has ransomed me  
And like a flood His mercy rains  
Unending love amazing grace

**Verse 3**

The Lord has promised good to me  
His word my hope secures  
He will my shield and portion be  
As long as life endures

**Verse 4**

The earth shall soon dissolve like snow  
The sun forbear to shine  
But God who called me here below  
Will be forever mine

Will be forever mine  
You are forever mine

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