

Sunday Thought

27th March 2022 Fourth Sunday in Lent

Readings

Joshua 5: 9 - 12

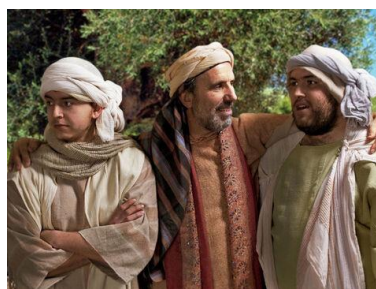
Psalm 32

2 Corinthians 5: 16 - 31

Luke 15: 1 - 3, 11b - 32

It's about my brother too!

Lent is about *'getting ready for the occasion'*. The occasion is Easter and getting ready is six weeks of sorting ourselves for a closer and deeper life with Jesus. Six weeks refers to the time Jesus spent in the Judaeen desert, preparing himself for his ministry. While the devil may not be so obvious to us, we share times of repentance and forgiveness, self-denial, and almsgiving. It's a



time for new beginnings and learning more of the amazing grace of God. That is the significance of today's reading from Joshua. It's day one in the Promised Land. Refugees take their first 'proper' breakfast in forty years – including a sort of granola! I am interested to read how with that first meal God's provision of manna ceased. The Lord is a superb catering manager, and his people were to learn how he has everything under control. I am so glad I asked him to manage my life. Soon his people were to celebrate their first Passover in a new land. It was their 'Lent' – getting ready for new life in a new land.

Paul's words to Christians at Corinth are on a similar theme. He tells them how by their faith in Jesus, God has given them a whole new experience of life. They are now *friends of God*. We, like them, can have the relationship with our Lord which Abram first had. United to Christ, who shared our sinful life to make us holy we share a wonderful new relationship with God in which sinners are being turned into saints - slowly learning to let him be the manager of their lives. *'We are speaking for Jesus,'* said Paul, when we challenge the whole world to *'let God change you from enemies to friends.'*

Change and new management is the dominant theme of Jesus' story today which we know as *The Prodigal Son*. As with many of Jesus' stories, the title we give this one is misleading. If the returned 'prodigal' were to read it in the press, he would immediately protest, *'No. No. It's not all about me. It's about my brother too! Call it The story of Two Brothers.'* It is of course the tale of a penitent son returning home in disgrace to find a gracious, forgiving welcome from his father. It has brought millions of people to the heart of the Gospel and to discover for themselves the gracious forgiveness of the Father – God. But the story is also about an older brother who had stayed at home with his parents.

Working with half the land and stock, having to make workers redundant, sharing the shame his brother had brought on the whole family, his pique is understandable. He hears the good news of his brother's return. Red faced, he storms around the yard, muttering to himself, *I'm not going into any feast! It's not fair. Our father has no real idea of justice! I've been slaving here with no real appreciation or obvious thanks! It's the first time I've heard music and dancing in this place for years. Can we really afford feasts, fine clothes, expensive jewellery? I am **not** going to that sinners' party. It's a disgrace!*

That, of course, is the point of the story (see verse 2). It is addressed to 'the religious' – the older brothers who are reluctant to have ex-sinners and tax-collectors in God's congregations. *'We were here first!'* The best part of the story is when father goes out to find big brother sulking over a farm gate. *'Son. Come and join us. You've lost nothing. Our relationship hasn't changed. We will all gain from this. You're still my son. The farm is still yours. Let's find new ways of living and working together.'* Today, the story has much to say about our desire to be an inclusive church. The church is not without its older brothers – and sisters too!

Lent teaches us again about the importance of forgiveness and new beginnings. That is not going to be easy when the Ukraine conflict is history. Another picture from last year's news comes to my mind. It was from Myanmar (Burma) another among so many places of cruel war. It shows soldiers about to shoot rebel



protesters while Sister Ann Rose, a Christian nun is pleading. *Don't shoot them. 'Take my life instead.'* I recall an old story of a small Christian community a little way north of there. They were about to begin their communion when one man stood to say, *'Before I take bread and wine, I need to confess to friends I have wronged. To ask*

their forgiveness.' From there the Holy Spirit took over. Other worshippers too had confessions to make to one another. In the next weeks the experience spread along their valley as old divisions were broken down. A real Lent had come to their churches bringing Holy Spirit revival.

A Prayer for Forgiveness (with Psalm 32 in mind)

Lord, My Father and my God, I bring myself to the Cross of Jesus where I see the enormity of sin, in me and in the whole world. It makes my heart fill with sadness, my eyes with tears, because sin dams the constant stream of love.

But here too,

I see the far greater enormity of your love which no dam can block. Your forgiveness is waiting to flood my life.

I turn from the Cross, to face the world, lost in the endless flow of your grace, which turns back the forces of evil, offering free forgiveness and mercy, and all for the price of faith in Jesus, your Son, my Saviour, my life-manager, my God.



