

## Readings and Sermon for Lent 4 Yr C

[Joshua 5:9-12, 2 Corinthians 5:16-21, Luke 15:1-3, 11b-32](#)

### Sermon for Lent 4 Yr C

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be now and always acceptable in your sight, O Lord our rock and our redeemer.

I guess most of you will know the sort of joke – at least I think it's meant to be a joke -which begins 'What's 2+2 ?'

You proceed to ask a number of presumed experts, who each give you an answer appropriate to their specialisation, So the Mathematician says '4', the Scientist / Engineer, being aware of the limits of measurement, says something like 'between 3.999 and 4.001' the punch line is supposed to come when you ask an Accountant ( apologies to any Accountants here!), who is presumed to respond by asking you, in return, the question 'What would you like it to be?'

I feel a bit like that standing here today, on a day which can have several names. If you are following The Retreat in Daily life organised here by Rob Hingley you may know it as the 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Lent; you may also know it as Mothering Sunday ( but in the USA ( and, Yvette tells me , the Caribbean) that's the second Sunday in May), Laetare Sunday, from the Latin collect for today, mid lent Sunday, refreshment Sunday, Rose Sunday (so some churches of a certain Liturgical style will use Rose pink as the liturgical colour instead of the traditional Purple of Lent or the unbleached linen of Lenten Array).

So what of today – I've taken the readings for Lent 4 as the basis, not because I'd specially like it to be that day rather than other possibilities, but because I felt there were important things to say about the readings – the Gospel is the well known parable of the Prodigal Son ( the observant among you will have noted that it's a split reading, and you may remember my comment that it's worth seeing what has been missed out – in this case, the parable of the lost sheep and the parable of the lost coin- both significant, but not used here) why is Jesus telling it? – because the Guardians of Public Morality are complaining that he seems more inclined to associate with sinners and Tax Collectors ( You probably recall that being a tax collector in those times was NOT an honourable occupation) rather than with them, who are, at least in their own eyes, the just and upright.

In the parable, it's been argued, Jesus is telling them that the Kingdom is not what they expect, or perhaps even want it to be, that God's loving mercy exceeds that which humans expect, perhaps, even, they are afraid of it's demands.

It seems to me that much of the story of humanity's interaction with the concept we speak of as 'God' has been one of rejecting the demands of love, of trying to put the idea in a specimen bottle, where it can be studied without danger of having to respond to it.

Indeed the response of the older son, the one who stays at home, is probably closer to what would have been expected as normal at the time, though is he in some way guilty of rejecting his father's love? Much depends, on how you view the parable – is the father really God? – and we don't get to hear the end of the story – is that deliberate, to make us generate our own ending? ,and does the ending we make say as much about us as anything else?

It's been argued that the younger son, in demanding his share of the inheritance before his father's death ( something which may have put the family into financial difficulty- what's new here ? *Broken and I, Daniel Blake* have things to say to us here and now about modern poverty) this son is effectively declaring that his father is dead to him, is cutting himself off from the Family. Despite which, when he finally comes back, his father seems to forget the problems and sets about rejoicing.

Today, on Mothering Sunday, I have to ask 'where are the women in this' ? They don't appear in the story apart from in some imaginative paintings from a much later time which seem to assume that ladies, whom Terry Pratchett might perhaps have described as being of 'negotiable affection', were an essential component of the 'dissolute living' mentioned in v13 of the parable.(perhaps they couldn't think that there might be other possibilities? LGBTQ+ perhaps wasn't so visible,in former times though certainly it was there, in their world) The women who were behind the story don't seem to get a mention, though they may have suffered not a little as the result of the younger son's departure.

The younger son does things, mainly involving Swine, in his extremity which would have rendered him ritually unclean to Observant Jews. So it's all a bit of a mess.

Then there's the slave, who gets picked on by the older son- what would have happened to him ( the passage refers to the slave as being male, and I've taken that to be correct – would it make a difference if it were a female slave?) if he hadn't been able to come up with a reply? – the question seem to be left unanswered., and leaves us to contemplate the situation of slaves in those, and our , times

In all of this , ( as I've suggested for Meditation) I find myself asking: Where am I? can I relate to any of the people in the parable? Or to more than one? Is there a bit of each person in me?

And what of our other readings – in the OT reading we hear of the arrival of the Tribes in the promised land, of their eating of the fruits of the earth – the unleavened bread – no mention of Lamb, which suggests that this is the earlier festival of Unleavened Bread , before it was joined with the passover. Anyway, we are in no doubt that the People of Israel have changed from Wanderers to a settled form of life, with all that implies in terms of connection with the Land as a source of food which seems to be a major point in this parable.

2 Corinthians reminds us, like the Gospel, ( leaving out the discussion of 'which came first') that God does not judge as humans do – the passage has an eschatological tone, with old things passing away, everything being made new, but reminds us , as does the Gospel, that it is our mission, as ambassadors, not merely officials, but as people charged to continue God's mission of reconciliation into the future, to bring God's love and mercy into reality

So we go out this week, charged to show God's loving face to the world – all the world Men, Women, LGBTQ+– no easy task, but supported by the Spirit, not an impossible one