

Notes for Next Sunday
Fourth Sunday in Lent

The Point of this Week's Readings

Old Testament (Isaiah 12:1-6). Luther states: "A Christian confesses that he was condemned and lost and that he has received from Christ everything that belongs to salvation and righteousness; all his own merits he considers worth nothing. This is the fullest and most perfect sacrifice, and it embraces everything in the Old Testament. There animals and cattle were slaughtered; here our own wisdom and righteousness, our endeavors and works." This good news is to be shared with the world.

Epistle (2 Corinthians 5:16-21). Paul begins with confessing that he had not always thought of Christ as his Savior. Paul quickly accelerates to pronouncing that anyone who is in Christ is a new creation and has been reconciled to Christ. Being reconciled, means that this person is no longer an enemy of God. Then Paul moves a Christian's status to the lofty position of being Christ's ambassador. There is no higher honor than to share the message of reconciliation to with others. Paul ends this reading by explaining how the perfect Christ is made sin for us so that we can be made righteous.

Gospel (Luke 15:1-3, 11-32). Verses 1-3 express how hungry the people were for the Gospel after being beat down by rule after rule. Verses 11-32 show a loving father (God) who is open to be deeply hurt by his two sons. In spite of the cruel words and actions of the sons, the father never stops loving his sons and reaching out to them. The sons represent self-centered mankind, in other words, us. The lesson for us is that God never gives up on us and always wants to have a loving relationship with Him.

For more in-depth commentary on each reading, read the notes found after each text below.

OLD TESTAMENT – Isaiah 12:1-6

In that day you will say: "I will praise you, O LORD. Although you were angry with me, your anger has turned away and you have comforted me. ² Surely God is my salvation; I will trust and not be afraid. The LORD, the LORD, is my strength and my song; he has become my salvation." ³ With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation. ⁴ In that day you will say: "Give thanks to the LORD, call on his name; make known among the nations what he has done, and proclaim that his name is exalted. ⁵ Sing to the LORD, for he has done glorious things; let this be known to all the world. ⁶ Shout aloud and sing for joy, people of Zion, for great is the Holy One of Israel among you."

12:1-3 you. The movement of the chapter is from an individual (v. 1) to a group (v. 3). An individual may have sung or recited these first verses. (TLSB)

12:1 I will praise you. Isaiah's first song of praise, a liturgical response to what is being proclaimed. (TLSB)

12:1 your anger has turned away. The church gives thanks not for wrath that is present, but for wrath that has been taken away; for when the yoke of sin and death has been removed, then it will help to remember the evils. Paul says in Rom. 1:18 and 4:15 that "the Law brings wrath," and from this wrath the Gospel frees when it is believed. (Luther)

12:2 I will trust. This is the peace and safety of the conscience when it knows God as reconciled and Christ as Savior and Protector. But if it is still afraid of something, this is a temptation of the devil or a residue of the old man. (Luther)

12:2 *my strength and song*. God is our only strength. He has won the victory, and He alone is worthy of praise. (TLSB)

12:3 *wells*.† Perhaps an allusion to God’s abundant provision of water for Israel during the desert wanderings (cf. Ex 15:25, 27). But here God’s future saving act is itself the “well” from which the redeemed will draw life-giving water (see Ps 36:9; Jer 2:13; Jn 4:10). (CSB)

12:6 *be known to all the world*. Israel is a missionary people (cf Gn 12:1–3), commissioned to be God’s priests or representatives to the nations (Ex 19:5–6). (TLSB)

EPISTLE – 2 Corinthians 5:16-21

¹⁶ So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. ¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! ¹⁸ All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: ¹⁹ that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men’s sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. ²⁰ We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ’s behalf: Be reconciled to God. ²¹ God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

5:16 *we once regarded Christ in this way*. Paul had previously thought of Jesus as a mere man. He foolishly rejected Christ and persecuted His Church. (TLSB)

5:17 *in Christ*. United with Christ through faith in him and commitment to him. (CSB)

5:18 *reconciled*. All people are alienated and cut off from God because of sin and rebellion. Christ’s death on the cross bridges that eternal gap by paying sinful humanity’s just punishment. Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection not only redeemed us but also restored us to fellowship with Him (Col. 1:22). (TLSB)

5:20 *ambassadors*. Representatives who speak on behalf of the heads of states/countries possess the authority of the one who sends them. The Corinthians then, in challenging Paul’s ambassadorship to them, were in reality challenging Jesus. (TLSB)

GOSPEL – Luke 15:1-3, 11-32

Now the tax collectors and “sinners” were all gathering around to hear him. ² But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, “This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.” ³ Then Jesus told them this parable:

15:1 *tax collectors and “sinners.”* (Taxes were collected for the Roman government by Jewish agents, who were especially detested for helping the pagan conqueror and for frequently defrauding their own people); Mk 2:15 (Sinners were notoriously evil people as well as those who either refused or lacked the time to follow the Mosaic law as interpreted by the teachers of the law. The term was commonly used to tax collectors, adulterers, robbers and the like).

15:1 *were all gathering*. They kept coming. It was as though there was a sucking power that Jesus had; like a magnet and iron filings.

15:2 *muttered*. Complained among themselves, but not openly. (CSB)

It meant that they started a dirty rumor about Jesus. “He is bringing disgrace upon the whole business of Rabbinic work.” (Stuenkel)

¹¹ Jesus continued: “There was a man who had two sons. ¹² The younger one said to his father, ‘Father, give me my share of the estate.’ So he divided his property between them. ¹³ “Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living. ¹⁴ After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. ¹⁵ So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. ¹⁶ He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything. ¹⁷ “When he came to his senses, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired men have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! ¹⁸ I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. ¹⁹ I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired men.’ ²⁰ So he got up and went to his father. “But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him. ²¹ “The son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’ ²² “But the father said to his servants, ‘Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. ²³ Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let’s have a feast and celebrate. ²⁴ For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’ So they began to celebrate. ²⁵ “Meanwhile, the older son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. ²⁶ So he called one of the servants and asked him what was going on. ²⁷ ‘Your brother has come,’ he replied, ‘and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.’ ²⁸ “The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him. ²⁹ But he answered his father, ‘Look! All these years I’ve been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. ³⁰ But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!’ ³¹ “My son,’ the father said, ‘you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. ³² But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’”

15:11–32 The father represents God, the prodigal represents a sinner, and the older brother represents those who consider themselves to be “righteous persons who need no repentance” (v 7). (TLSB)

15:12 *give me*. I want to get out and away from you, an insulting demand. (Stuenkel)

15:12 *share of the estate*. The possibility exists that the father might tell the older and younger sons how he would divide the inheritance, usually two-thirds for the eldest and the remaining third for the other sons minus the dowries for the daughters. (CC p. 597)

15:13 *got together all he had*. The process of disposing of the estate would have been difficult in a community that was completely opposed to the prodigal’s request and shocked at the father’s consent. The son would have to cut a quick deal with someone unscrupulous enough to help this young man turn his property into cash. Pawn shop. (Just)

15:13 *set off*. Man has a free will. God would have no service that is forced. (Ylvisaker)

15:13 *distant country*. Actually means overseas, wherever the father wasn’t. (Stuenkel)

15:13 *wild living*. The idea combines carelessness with moral laxity (cf v 30). (TLSB)

15:14 *famine*. The life of a penniless foreigner was especially difficult when there was little food around. (TLSB)

15:16 pods. Carob pods were regarded as animal fodder and were eaten only by the desperately poor. (TLSB)

15:18-19 The son realizes his wickedness and his plight but would still bargain for his father's help, an illustration of the depth of human depravity. (TLSB)

15:20 compassion. To have bowels yearning. In the NT, this word is largely used only of God, of Jesus, and in parables of characters representing God. E.g., it describes the Good Samaritan, which likely represents Jesus. The word, therefore, represents gracious love beyond the human norm, understanding and reaching into the life of another. (TLSB)

15:20 ran to him. Shows acceptance of the wayward son before any question is asked. Remarkably, the father ran to his son, which was below the dignity of the older man. (TLSB)

15:22-23 best robe ... ring ... sandals ... feast. Each was a sign of position and acceptance (cf. Ge 41:42; Zec 3:4): a long robe of distinction, a signet ring of authority, sandals like a son (slaves went barefoot), and the fattened calf for a special occasion.

15:28 The older brother. The forgiving love of the father symbolizes the divine mercy of God, and the older brother's resentment is like the attitude of the Pharisees and teachers of the law who opposed Jesus. (CSB)

15:28 refused to go in. The sound of the music should have caused him to run in and join the festivities; as the older brother, he would be required by custom to serve as the host-steward of the meal. The older son was responsible for arrangements so that the father could serve as the gracious host. But the older son does not join the festivities, let alone take charge of them. (LL)

15:28 pleaded with him. The imperfect suggests that the father was continually pleading with him. (CC) Again, the father disregards the dignity of his position and condescends to encourage a son. (TLSB)

15:29 never disobeyed your orders. Hyperbole. Yet, this son behaved as he thought his younger brother should have behaved—as a servant. (TLSB)

15:31 my son. The word for son is a most loving term for a child.

15:31 you are always with me. The older son did not realize that being with his father was its own reward. (TLSB)