

NORTH MAIN SERMON MARCH 30, 2025

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, the new creation has come:^[a] The old has gone, the new is here! 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 people'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^[b] for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

The Parable of the Lost Sheep

¹⁵ Now the tax collectors and sinners were all gathering around to hear Jesus. 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: ⁴ "Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Doesn't he leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? ⁵ And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders ⁶ and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.'

Luke 15:11-32

The Parable of the Lost Son

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 servants 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 servants.’ 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.'"

THE WORD OF GOD FOR THE PEOPLE OF GOD.

Sometimes our readings for the week seem to have nothing to do with each other..

From our reading today from CORINTHIANS..

"So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new". That is exactly what most of us are afraid of. Everything old has passed away. But we like a lot of the old me. In fact, for me I like most of the old me. Sure, nobody is perfect, but all that was needed was a minor correction here to a few things that weren't always good; moderate a few other minor habits that were rather excessive. Just a touch-up here and there and we would have been fine. But Paul says to the Corinthians in his letter.. and in fact he had to do in two letters...If anyone be in Christ, they are a new creation. And that's where the problem is. It isn't me that needs to be made better, it is all of them. If everyone except me.. would be better, then there would be no problem. That is precisely one of the major problems the good news has. There is all this talk about being a new creation in Christ, and we are not

sure we want to be a new creation. We have been told by the New Age religion that God is everywhere and we are like God, so we feel pretty good about ourselves. Why should we want to be different? "So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation, everything old has passed away; everything has become new." We don't think we need to be made new, but we do think everyone else needs to be worked on. This is sort of how the parable of the lost Son came about. The Son did not think he needed to change.. The parable of the prodigal son begins with a declaration of independence. The young son of the good father has decided to make his own way in the world. Evidently he finds himself pinched by the constraining limits of family life. The household traditions have grown to seem oppressive to the young man, whose imagination is filled with the exciting possibilities of the wider world. The familiar atmosphere has grown stale. Surely life must have more to offer than this. Surely there are places where the rising of the sun brings something new with it and not just more of the same old stuff yesterday was made of. The son wants to experience the thrill of the unknown. He believes this will not be possible as long as he stays under the protective but suffocating roof of his father's house. He must leave. He must go out and live on his own. He must be free. The young man has so often been depicted as a rowdy "party animal." Consequently most of us don't see ourselves in him. The young man was a self-indulgent person who was utterly without prudence or forethought. Sure, the Bible says that he got involved in "loose living." But must we conclude that he was after nothing more than simple freedom from his Father? Perhaps what was going on was that he was on a quest for self-realization. He wanted to expand his horizons, discover new things about himself and his world, find out who he was apart from his father. Perhaps he did things he had never done before so that he could learn to be himself, and not just be his father's son. Perhaps by doing more he could be more. If

he could just cast off the limitations and responsibilities of the past he could live in a magnificent freedom that would put all manner of exciting possibilities at his fingertips.

It took the prodigal son some time to make this realization. But finally, the Bible tells us, "he came to himself." He discovered that life independent of his father was not so grand as he thought it might be. The hard-won knowledge that he attained was that his purpose in life and his true identity were to be found in his father's household, not in rebellion and isolation from his father. The prodigal son had a bad experience with his freedom. The consequences of his actions were more than he could bear. He was entirely ready to get rid of it. "I will arise and go to my father, and I will say . . . I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me as one of your hired servants." But while it can be a dangerous and demeaning thing to give up our freedom to other people, it is only as we place our freedom in the hands of God that we can live in true freedom and experience liberation as children of God. When the prodigal son went home he never did ask to be received as a servant. He was taken back as a son. If we are ever to find any reconciliation and peace, it is going to be as we accept the gift of God to make us all new in the gift of Christ just like the prodigal Son. We should not come judging you and telling you that you need to become reconciled because you have these faults. We invite you into Christ so that Christ might be at work in not because I need to change or "I'm better than you, but so that Christ can work in both of us. We are not to be like the older Brother. We are to accept each other with our faults and our inability to change. So, it is in our relationship with God. The word of command is a word of blessing and the call to be children and servants of God is a call of the One who loves us more than we love ourselves. Like the good father of the parable, God has given us the capacity to choose to live against the divine Word

or to live out of relationship with God. But true freedom is ours only as we are willing to be servants in the household of God who lovingly receives us as sons and daughters, and to admit that we are not perfect and we can work on being better. We need to be more like the parable of the lost sheep and accept the fact that Jesus teaches us about God's immense love and compassion for each individual, and His willingness to seek and rejoice over the return of even one, emphasizing the value of every person in His eyes. Both of the parables that our Gospel readings today share is the rejoicing God has when we turn to him and seek his help and blessing. So if anyone is in Christ, everything old is new again, and we need to accept the fact that we may just have to change a little.. The parable also serves as a call to action for believers, urging us to actively seek out and care for those who are lost or need our help. The core of each parable remains the same. God has an absolutely love each of us and he reminds of that we should not give up on anyone who may have wandered from God. Let's pray for them. Let's search for them. Let's love them. It's what Jesus does for all who are lost.