

The Fourth Sunday of Lent March 27, 2022



Come to life

St. John United Church of Christ
10207 Lincoln Trail, Fairview Heights, IL
397-6323

Rev. Rosemary Captain

Organist - Sharon Banjacvic

Liturgy - Rev. Michelle Torigian

Ushers - Becky and Larry Riess

*Please stand if comfortably able
and respond with words in **bold** print

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WELCOME AND ANNOUNCEMENTS:

PRELUDE: "The King of Love My Shepherd Is"

Carol Parson

***CALL TO WORSHIP:** (Inspired by Psalm 32)

Happy are those who experience the grace of God,

Who find forgiveness and mercy from the Holy One.

Happy are those who experience the steadfast love
of God,

Who find peace even in times of trial.

Happy are those who experience rest in God,

Who find sabbath to renew their spirit.

***INVOCATION:**

Holy God, Holy Renewal,

After times of broken relationships, painful injustices,
and feeling deserted, we enter this season yearning
for restoration and your comforting grace. In this
time of wilderness and reflection, we evaluate the
relationships between us and our neighbors. Fill our
weary souls with hope. Lead us on roads of renewal,
and focus our minds as we ponder our callings in your
realm. Amen.

***OPENING HYMN: NCH 423**

"Great Is Thy Faithfulness"

***PRAYER OF REFLECTION AND GROWTH:**

Holy Breath of Life,
There are moments when our decisions do not take into consideration the well-being of our neighbors. There are times when our reactions turn inward instead of building healthy reconciliation. How is it that we are holding back our neighbor's rebirth? How are our implicit and explicit biases restricting God's grace and radical love? How do our actions and biases impede our own spiritual growth?

Urge us to be life-giving agents of your love. May each of our steps be healing not only to us, but to our siblings on the journey. Amen. Silence

***ASSURANCE OF GOD'S GRACE:**

God, our Divine Parent, runs towards us with infinite love and grace. May the mercy we experience transform our minds, hearts, and souls. May we extend God's grace as we run towards our Divine Parent.

***GLORIA PATRI:**

Glory to the Creator, the Christ, the Holy Spirit, Three- in-One; as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen. Amen.

SCRIPTURE: 2 Corinthians 5:16-21 The words of Paul

¹⁶ So then, from this point on we won't recognize people by human standards. Even though we used to know Christ by human standards, that isn't how we know him now. ¹⁷ So then, if anyone is in Christ, that person is part of the new creation. The old things have gone away, and look, new things have arrived!

¹⁸ All of these new things are from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and who gave us the ministry of reconciliation. ¹⁹ In other words, God was reconciling the world to himself through Christ, by not counting people's sins against them. He has trusted us with this message of reconciliation.

²⁰ So we are ambassadors who represent Christ. God is negotiating with you through us. We beg you as Christ's representatives, "Be reconciled to God!" ²¹ God caused the one who didn't know sin to be sin for our sake so that through him we could become the righteousness of God.

RESPONSIVE READING of Psalm 32 Page 642

***GOSPEL LESSON: Luke 15:1-3, 11b-32**

Occasions for celebration

15 All the tax collectors and sinners were gathering around Jesus to listen to him. ² The Pharisees and legal experts were grumbling, saying, "This man

welcomes sinners and eats with them.”³ Jesus told them this parable:

¹¹ Jesus said, “A certain man had two sons. ¹² The younger son said to his father, ‘Father, give me my share of the inheritance.’ Then the father divided his estate between them. ¹³ Soon afterward, the younger son gathered everything together and took a trip to a land far away. There, he wasted his wealth through extravagant living.

¹⁴ “When he had used up his resources, a severe food shortage arose in that country and he began to be in need. ¹⁵ He hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed pigs. ¹⁶ He longed to eat his fill from what the pigs ate, but no one gave him anything. ¹⁷ When he came to his senses, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired hands have more than enough food, but I’m starving to death! ¹⁸ I will get up and go to my father, and say to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. ¹⁹ I no longer deserve to be called your son. Take me on as one of your hired hands.” ’ ²⁰ So he got up and went to his father.

“While he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was moved with compassion. His father ran to him, hugged him, and kissed him. ²¹ Then his son said, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I no longer deserve to be called your son.’

²² But the father said to his servants, ‘Quickly, bring out the best robe and put it on him! Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet! ²³ Fetch the fattened calf and slaughter it. We must celebrate with feasting ²⁴ because this son of mine was dead and has come back to life! He was lost and is found!’ And they began to celebrate.

²⁵ “Now his older son was in the field. Coming in from the field, he approached the house and heard music and dancing. ²⁶ He called one of the servants and asked what was going on. ²⁷ The servant replied, ‘Your brother has arrived, and your father has slaughtered the fattened calf because he received his son back safe and sound.’ ²⁸ Then the older son was furious and didn’t want to enter in, but his father came out and begged him. ²⁹ He answered his father, ‘Look, I’ve served you all these years, and I never

disobeyed your instruction. Yet you've never given me as much as a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. ³⁰ But when this son of yours returned, after gobbling up your estate on prostitutes, you slaughtered the fattened calf for him.'

³¹ Then his father said, 'Son, 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. He was lost and is found.'"

This is the Word of God. It is true and can be trusted.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

**MESSAGE: "Obliterate sinners
or invite them to the Table?"**

Last Sunday we talked about repentance; turning around, changing our value systems, thinking of things in a different way. Today's Gospel is a good example of how Jesus was teaching about repentance via parables. At the very beginning we hear how the Pharisees and scribes thought about the actions of Jesus.

It was an offense to the scribes and Pharisees that Jesus associated with men and women who, by the orthodox, were labeled as sinners. The Pharisees

gave to people who did not keep the law a general classification. They called them *the People of the Land*; and there was a complete barrier between the Pharisees and the People of the Land. The Pharisaic regulations laid it down, "When a man is one of the People of the Land, entrust no money to him, take no testimony from him, trust him with no secret, do not appoint him guardian of an orphan, do not make him the custodian of charitable funds, do not accompany him on a journey." (As an aside, since we are all sinners, what would the enforcement of those rules look like in our world today?)

A Pharisee was forbidden to be the guest of any such man or to have him as his guest. He was even forbidden, so far as it was possible, to have any business dealings with him. It was the deliberate Pharisaic aim to avoid every contact with the people who did not observe the petty details of the law.

Obviously, they would be shocked to the core at the way in which Jesus kept company with people who were not only outsiders but sinners, contact with whom would necessarily defile.

We can understand these parables more fully if we remember that the strict Jews said, not "There will be joy in heaven over one sinner who repents," but "There will be joy in heaven over one sinner who is obliterated before God." They looked forward not to

the saving but to the destruction of the sinner. So, Jesus told them parables.

We did not read the parable of the lost sheep or the parable about the coin a woman lost and found. The shepherd was ecstatic when he found his wandering lamb. Likewise, the woman was joyous when she found her elusive coin and when she held it in her hand again. And God was thrilled when the lost son came home to his family. God, said Jesus, is like that. The joy of God when one sinner comes home, is like the joy of the found lamb, coin, or son.

No Pharisee had ever dreamed of a God like that. This is the one absolutely new thing which Jesus taught about God – that God actually searches for us. This is the type of changing our minds and value system that repentance can bring.

It is a wondrous thought here. It is the truly tremendous truth that God is kinder than men and women. (Can I get an AMEN?) The orthodox would write off the tax-collectors and the sinners as beyond the pale and as deserving of nothing but destruction; not so for God.

We may give up hope of a sinner; not so with God. God loves those who never stray away; but in God's heart there is the joy of joys when a lost one is found and comes home. It is 1,000 times easier to come

back to God than to come home to the bleak criticism of our fellow human beings.

Is there anyone in your family or who you know that needs to be welcomed back; not censured or condemned? Amen.

SING-A-LONG HYMN: NCH 474

"I'm So Glad Jesus Lifted Me" video

PASTORAL PRAYER: Beginning with silent personal prayer. Gracious and ever-loving God, we thank you for all you have given us, especially the gift of your Son, Jesus, who does love us no matter what. Jesus came to show us the way to God's kingdom by giving us parables to help us realize the truths of our Father.

Though we might well hang our heads in shame, heavenly Parent, when we remember what we have done contrary to your instruction, we come with joy and shining faces, for you put our past behind us and lead us to a new life of freedom and mutual service.

We will bless your name continually and tell of your goodness to the humble, who will hear an also be glad. With all who have been freed from the bondage of sin, we celebrate the Passover of gladness and the joyful feast of the people of God.

We pray for all who find themselves in times of difficulty and distress of body, mind, or spirit, especially those on our prayer list, those suffering in

the Ukraine, and those near and dear to us whom we name in the silence before you. Though we do not merit your blessing, for the sake of Christ grant healing, patience, and peace to all. We pray all these things in the name of your beloved Son, Jesus . . .

THE LORD'S PRAYER:

Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be your name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen.

PRAYER RESPONSE: NCH 769

**Hear our prayer, O God, hear our prayer, O God;
Incline your ear to us, and grant us your peace.**

REFLECTION ON GIVING:

Even when our gifts become dormant, God our Divine Parent stirs our hearts, calling us to bring to life our gifts once again. What gifts may God be challenging us to revive? How can these treasures, talents, and time create equitable communities?

OFFERTORY: "If That Isn't Love" Dottie Rambo

***DOXOLOGY:**

**Praise God from whom all blessings flow;
Praise God, all creatures here below;
Praise God for all that love has done.
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen.**

***PRAYER OF DEDICATION:**

**Loving God, Holy Fountain of Blessings,
With gratitude, we celebrate the offerings we share with you and this community today. May they enliven our spirits, building excitement around us, and creating a culture of giving. Open us to new possibilities for using our gifts to build the dignity of all and to strengthen our neighborhoods. Amen.**

***CLOSING HYMN: NCH 476**

"How Can I Keep from Singing"

***BENEDICTION:**

May our spirits come alive in this season of Lent
When we run to God, our Divine Parent, with the hopes of strengthening our bonds,
When we embrace the Christ, our Divine Neighbor, with the hopes of reconciliation,
When we breathe with the Spirit, our Divine Encourager, in the hopes of peace.
Amen.

BENEDICTION RESPONSE: Words on the screen.

“Let Their Be Peace on Earth”

POSTLUDE: “Paeon” George Blake

PRAYER LIST: The family and friends of Rich Schmitt, Ardella Morris and Jim Garrett.

Urban Baum, Donna Isselhard, David Seneczyn, Warren Neff, Carol White, Dennis Franklin, John Biehl, Cheri Schutzenhofer, Dorothy Wagner, Granddaughter Captain, Lori Riess, and Theo Mally.