

MARCH 30, 2025
FOURTH SUNDAY IN LENT
LUKE 15:1-3, 11B-32 | "SQUANDERED"



**ST. JOHN UNITED
CHURCH OF CHRIST**
10207 Lincoln Trail Fairview Heights, IL
Telephone 618-397-6323
e-mail- stjohnuccfairview@gmail.com
Website: www.stjohnfairview.org
Rev. Rosemary Captain
Organist – Sharon Banjavcic
Liturgy – Rev. Ruth Garwood
(NCH) New Century Hymnal -
CCLI LICENSE #11164431
*Please stand if comfortably able.
Respond with words in bold print.

Ushers –

ANNOUNCEMENTS AND PRAYER CONCERNS

A PRAYER FOR OUR TIME

THE BELL IS RUNG

PRELUDE "Jesus Walked This Lonesome Valley"
Hugh S. Livingston, Jr.

PENNIES FOR MISSION One Great Hour of Sharing

***RESPONSIVE CALL TO WORSHIP**

One: Have you come far to be here today?

Many: You enlarge our gathering: welcome!

One: Have you come from around the corner?

Many: You anchor our gathering: welcome!

One: Do you seek sanctuary? Do you seek inspiration?

Many: May this worship meet you.

One: Do you come with purpose? Do you come with questions?

Many: We welcome you as you are!

All: Let us worship God together!

***INVOCATION**

Holy One, we come into your presence and the presence of this fellowship. We are seeking a little light, some hope, healing. Open us to know you, to receive you and find here your transforming love. Amen.

***OPENING HYMN 202 “O God, How We Have Wondered”**

***PRAYER FOR TRANSFORMATION AND NEW LIFE**

Dear God, your gifts are generous and yet we often fail to appreciate what we have been given. We demand more, but squander what we have received. Forgive us for taking for granted what we receive from you. When we fail to accept what you offer, or fail to steward those gifts, bring us back to awareness of you. Amen.

***WORDS OF GRACE**

However far we wander, God is always ready to receive us, to enfold us in love and grace. In the name of Jesus, you are forgiven.

***GLORIA Glory to the Creator, and the Christ and the Spirit so near. As it was from the start so it shall be forever, One God always here. (repeat twice)
(end) One God always here. One God always here.**

SCRIPTURE LESSON Joshua 5:9-12

⁹ Then the Lord said to Joshua, “Today I have rolled away from you the disgrace of Egypt.” So the place was called Gilgal, as it is today.

Passover

¹⁰ The Israelites camped in Gilgal. They celebrated Passover on the evening of the fourteenth day of the month on the plains of Jericho. ¹¹ On the very next day after Passover, they ate food produced in the land: unleavened bread and

roasted grain. ¹² The manna stopped on that next day, when they ate food produced in the land. There was no longer any manna for the Israelites. So that year they ate the crops of the land of Canaan.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM Psalm 32 Page 642

EPISTLE LESSON 2 Corinthians 5:16-21

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.
Amen.

***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.’”

These are the ancient words revealed to us anew.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

MESSAGE: “Good news of the Gospel”

My Preaching professor told us, “always preach the good news of the gospel.” No matter what, preach the good news of the gospel. You might think that there is no good news as Jesus is betrayed, and crucified. However, in today’s lection all the readings converge on the theme of God’s actions to save the lost or sinful. I think that sounds like good news. The key phrase in the Old Testament reading affirms that the Lord has “rolled away from you the disgrace of Egypt.

Perhaps Psalm 32 has the best good news. The psalm pronounces as happy those whose sins are forgiven, and urges that sin be acknowledged. It expresses confidence and joy in the God who forgives. The Epistle proclaims the good news in cosmic terms. “In Christ God was reconciling the world to himself” . In the Gospel lection, through the parable of the prodigal son Jesus proclaims forgiveness.

Have you ever really thought about the God we worship? Is God vengeful, full of wrath, full of hate unless you follow him, the God who makes bad things happen? NO The God we worship is full of love, mercy, and forgiveness. God never leaves us and does not want to lose any of us. Is God like the evil witch in the Disney stories?

These past few Sundays we have been discussing words like repentance, renewal, reconciliation, confession, forgiveness, salvation, second chances. Do any of those words sound bad? I don’t think so.

You would think that during Lent we would be concentrating on how bad we are, especially as compared

to Jesus and any of us who are weak, and sinful. Comparing ourselves to Jesus is a fruitless endeavor. All God asks is for us to try; do better than we did last year. Talk to God more often and use words like repentance, renewal, reconciliation, confession, forgiveness, salvation, second chances. Only the God we worship uses those words and we are very grateful. We have second, third, fourth, chances and more. God doesn’t give up on us and we should not give up on God.

SPECIAL MUSIC “The King of Love My Shepherd Is” Video

PASTORAL PRAYER

God of today and God of tomorrow. God of happiness and God of sorrow. Thank you for being with us through it all; through all our highs and lows; through the crucifixion and through the resurrection; through confessions of sins to reconciliation and redemption. Thank you.

No matter what is happening in the world, dear God, you bring us good news. We may not be joyful all the time, but we know you are there working on the problem. Help us see the possibilities. Help us find the helpers.

Be with those who are suffering physical ailments or mental issues. Help those who are lonely, depressed, or who have lost all hope of better health and better things to come. We pray for all those on our prayer list and all those on our hearts that we don’t mention.

Hear as we pray together with one voice . . .

THE LORD'S PRAYER

PRAYER RESPONSE "Change My Heart, O God"
(song twice)

Change my heart, O God, make it ever true.
Change my heart, O God, may I be like you.
You are the Potter, I am the clay;
Mold me and make me, this is what I pray.
Change my heart, O God, make it ever true.
Change my heart, O God, may I be like you.

INVITATION TO GENEROSITY

Remembering the gifts we have received, let us make our offerings to God's work through this church.

OFFERTORY "Treasure of Calvary" Don Newman

***DOXOLOGY 785 "We Give You but your Own"**

We give you but your own,
whate'er the gift may be;
All that we have is yours alone,
we give it gratefully.

***PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING AND DEDICATION**

Gracious God, bless these gifts and our lives to your service.

***CLOSING HYMN 42 "O For a Thousand Tongues to Sing"**

BENEDICTION

May you trust that God's unfailing love and blessings go with you this day and always. Amen.

BENEDICTION RESPONSE "Let There Be Peace on Earth"

THE BELL IS RUNG

POSTLUDE "Joyous Postlude" Chester Nordman

PRAYER LIST Jan Miller