

Praying the Scripture - a few simple steps at home

Sunday 27th March 2022

Start with stillness and quietening down; then gently read the passage, noticing any feelings and connections to your own experience.

1. Read the passage again and spend understand. *The notes in your Bible may be of help at this point.*
2. Read the passage a third time - wondering how you yourself might pray the text over the next few days.
3. Over the next week, set aside times to come back more than once to the passage. You could read it all or part of it again, slowly. Perhaps there is a special word for you in this passage of Scripture? Keep this word or phrase in your thoughts and gently repeat it, bringing it to mind and allowing God to speak to you in your heart.
4. Finally, come back to the text to conclude: What is God in this scripture asking of you this week? What is the one challenge, one little change you are asked to make or the thing you have been asked to do? Then say a prayer of thanksgiving for the good news in the passage. End in quiet prayer.



THIS SUNDAY'S GOSPEL – Luke 15:1-3, 11-32 *The Prodigal Son*

Tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to listen to Jesus, but the Pharisees and scribes began to complain, saying, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them." So, to them Jesus addressed this parable: "A man had two sons, and the younger son said to his father, 'Father give me the share of your estate that should come to me.' So, the father divided the property between them. After a few days, the younger son collected all his belongings and set off to a distant country where he squandered his inheritance on a life of dissipation. When he had freely spent everything, a severe famine struck that country, and he found himself in dire need. So, he hired himself out to one of the local citizens who sent him to his farm to tend the swine. And he longed to eat his fill of the pods on which the swine fed, but nobody gave him any. Coming to his senses he thought, 'How many of my father's hired workers have more than enough food to eat, but here am I, dying from hunger.



I shall get up and go to my father and I shall say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I no longer deserve to be called your son; treat me as you would treat one of your hired workers."

So, he got up and went back to his father. While he was still a long way off, his father caught sight of him, and was filled with compassion. He ran to his son, embraced him and kissed him. His son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you; I no longer deserve to be called your son.'

But his father ordered his servants, 'Quickly bring the finest robe and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Take the fattened calf and slaughter it. Then let us celebrate with a feast, because this son of mine was dead, and has come to life again; he was lost and has been found.' Then the celebration began.

Now the older son had been out in the field and, on his way back, as he neared the house, he heard the sound of music and dancing. He called one of the servants and asked what this might mean. The servant said to him, 'Your brother has returned, and your father has slaughtered the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.' He became angry, and when he refused to enter the house, his father came out and pleaded with him. He said to his father in reply, 'Look, all these years I served you and not once did I disobey your orders; yet you never gave me even a young goat to feast on with my friends.

But when your son returns who swallowed up your property with prostitutes, for him you slaughter the fattened calf.' He said to him, 'My son, you are here with me always; everything I have is yours. But now we must celebrate and rejoice, because your brother was dead and has come to life again; he was lost and has been found.'"

A Short Thought

The story is almost too familiar to all of us. The younger son returned home, and the older son stayed home. What is being asked of us? We are challenged to go deeper into the story and to become the father...to BE home for others. But, for a moment, what if God isn't the father in this story? What if God instead is the prodigal who seems so irresponsible? What if God is the God who also comes to us in the disguise of those we most despise, those who have hated and killed us, those who shun us and ignore us, those who have rejected us and abandoned us, those who annoy and frustrate us most, argue or disagree with us; those who are excluded? In the guise of the sinner, the debauched, the prostitute, the unclean, the enemy, the unchurched, the unsavoury, ... What if God comes to us and challenges us to participate in a radical, irresponsible, gospel hospitality that turns the rules of polite society and comfortable religiosity upside-down?

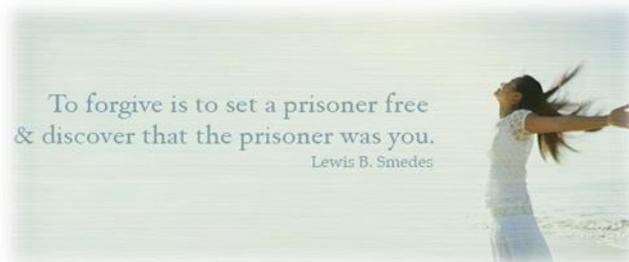
And if God comes to us as this, how do we respond? As the father does... subverting social norms, forgiving and opening his life to the chaos the prodigal brings? Or as the brother does, maintaining society's values but closing off his life to loving or accepting the Other? What if the challenge of this story is whether or not we will run out to meet Jesus with open arms when we see him lost, alone, bedraggled, ignored, neglected and abused; whether we will be eager and expectant to do the irresponsible thing of living out the Good News of radical mercy, forgiveness, inclusion, love and welcome. What if...? Do I, like the father in the story, have the generosity to accept Jesus as he appears; or like the brother, do I demand that he not be so irresponsible and insist that he comes to me only in the ways I find acceptable?

SOME POINTERS FOR PRAYER

- Like most I love this week's gospel. But if asked - What one word would sum up this story for you? Why?
- Read the story and try put yourself in the place of each of the characters – The Pharisees & Tax Collectors, The Father, The Younger Son, The Servants, The Older Son. How might they tell the story differently? What would they have been feeling as the story unfolded?
- What character in the parable appeals to you most? Which do you most identify with, Why?
- The older son may have felt rightly hard-done-by as his wayward brother receives the plaudits. But Jesus is teaching us that God's love is a gift freely given, not earned. And like any gift we have to recognise it, accept it and allow it to transform our lives and relationships. Where/when have you felt this love from others? And when has this made you think of God's love for you?
- To truly know that in our darkest hour, when we feel at our most alone we are always loved is Good News. Do we accept we are loved by God who is always ready to welcome us with open arms?

Prayer

Loving, compassionate Father, you stand always with your arms outstretched awaiting unconditionally for our return. Give us the courage to see, feel and know that we are loved. May we always have the strength to forgive and be forgiven so that we may always joyfully dance and sing in the wonder of your love. We ask this, as always, through Jesus Christ your son, Amen



Prayer in these uncertain times

We pray for all those in our country and throughout the world suffering from the Corona Virus. May its victims and their families be strengthened by the support of our community of faith and restored soon to full health. We also pray for our leaders and medical personnel who deal with the virus. May we keep calm and may we join together in solidarity with care and compassion to tackle this emergency. This we ask in confidence through Christ Our Lord. Amen

We pray for Ukraine. For all of humanity distorted by war. For all the lives lost, homes seized, and peace broken. May the Spirit of comfort and compassion envelop all who dwell in fear. May peace prevail and justice reign. May love always be the guide and measure of our actions and responses. Amen

