

# Lent 4



## Prayer of the Day

God of all mercy, by your power to heal and to forgive, graciously cleanse us from all sin and make us strong; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

## Joshua 5:9-12

{9} The LORD said to Joshua, "Today I have rolled away from you the disgrace of Egypt." And so that place is called Gilgal to this day. {10} While the Israelites were camped in Gilgal they kept the passover in the evening on the fourteenth day of the month in the plains of Jericho. {11} On the day after the passover, on that very day, they ate the produce of the land, unleavened cakes and parched grain. {12} The manna ceased on the day they ate the produce of the land, and the Israelites no longer had manna; they ate the crops of the land of Canaan that year.

*9. I have rolled away from you:* This is a popular etymology of the name Gilgal based on the verb *gll*, to be round, or to roll.

*the disgrace of Egypt:* This refers back to 5:1-8 which concerns the mass circumcision of the children born during the Exodus, who were thus brought into the covenant of Abraham (Genesis 17:9 ff.). Only the circumcised could take part in the Passover (Exodus 12:43-44).

*10. the fourteenth day of the month:* Passover takes place at the full moon of the first month. In Israel's lunar calendar every month began at the new moon, so the full moon would be two weeks later. Passover follows the Spring equinox, and the month of Passover is, by definition, the first month of the year. This is the first Passover after the Israelites entered the Promised Land.

*11. On the day after the passover...they ate the produce of the land, unleavened cakes and parched grain:* They had only entered the land four days earlier (Joshua 3:19), so they must have purchased "the produce of the land" which they ate.

*12. The manna ceased:* They had eaten manna since the fifteenth day of the second month after they left Egypt (Exodus 16:1 ff) on the morning after the first Passover. Now that they had access to "the produce of the land" it automatically ceased.

**Comment:** "Circumcision is the outward bodily sign which bears witness before all of one's membership of the covenant, and this is an indispensable condition for taking part in the Israelite solemnity of the Passover, rather as in the Christian church baptism is a condition for taking part in the eucharist. Moreover, both rites recall the liberation that has come about through God's mighty acts in the past." [1]

## Psalms 32

{1} Happy are those whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. {2} Happy are those to whom the LORD imputes no iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit. {3} While I kept silence, my body wasted away through my groaning all day long. {4} For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer. Selah {5} Then I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not hide my iniquity; I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD," and you forgave the guilt of my sin. Selah {6} Therefore let all who are faithful offer prayer to

you; at a time of distress, the rush of mighty waters shall not reach them. {7} You are a hiding place for me; you preserve me from trouble; you surround me with glad cries of deliverance. Selah {8} I will instruct you and teach you the way you should go; I will counsel you with my eye upon you. {9} Do not be like a horse or a mule, without understanding, whose temper must be curbed with bit and bridle, else it will not stay near you. {10} Many are the torments of the wicked, but steadfast love surrounds those who trust in the LORD. {11} Be glad in the LORD and rejoice, O righteous, and shout for joy, all you upright in heart.

3-5: The singer describes his/her situation. Until (s)he confessed “my transgressions to the LORD” (s)he suffered physically. Confession brought forgiveness and healing

6, 8-10: The singer encourages the faithful to pray to Yahweh when they are in distress. The way of the faithful should be disciplined, for the wicked suffer torment, while those who trust Yahweh are surrounded by love.

11: Three times in the Psalm the word “Selah” is used. Selah may indicate the place for a refrain in the song. Although no commentator suggests it, I wonder if verse 11 is not the refrain to be inserted following verses 4, 5 and 7, as well as in its present place. Comment: One of the seven traditional penitential Psalms (6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, 143). “The secret of Psalm 32...lies in the fact that this song from the very beginning takes the hearer and reader into the cheering reality of forgiveness and the bestowal of salvation.... ‘Forgiveness’ and ‘goodness’ are the gifts coming from Yahweh that are spontaneously given to him who opens up his life and confess his guilt (v. 5).... There is only one theme in the entire song of thanksgiving: the relation of the human being to God broken and restored through forgiveness.” [2] Paul quotes verses 1-2 in Romans 4:7-8 as an example of “the blessedness of those to whom God reckons righteousness apart from works.”

## **2 Corinthians 5:16-21**

{16} From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, we know him no longer in that way. {17} So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! {18} All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; {19} that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. {20} So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. {21} For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

The second lesson is concerned with “the ministry of reconciliation,” which is a continuation of Yahweh’s direct ministry in the Exodus, and the reconciliation that occurred in the Temple cultus.

*16. therefore:* Because of what has already been said in verses 11-14, namely that Christ has died for all, so that they might live for Christ.

*we regard no one from a human point of view:* “we” is the community of believers. “A person [*kata sarka*, “according to the flesh”] is such an entity or person with respect to what is empirically observable in him.” [3] We now consider others as we think of Christ as spiritual beings. This thought is picked up in verse 17, anyone “in Christ...is a new creation.”

*we once knew Christ from a human point of view:* “...the formulation in no way proves

Paul's own personal acquaintance with the earthly Jesus.... The meaning is thus that not even Christ may be regarded as he can be met with in the world." [4]

17. *everything old has passed away...everything has become new*: "Those who are *in Christ* have not only abandoned *worldly standards* of judgment (v. 16); they have also become part of a wholly *new creation*.... Paul can affirm that the new age has already broken in (see also 6:2), that the *new creation* is already a reality.... This exists by the power of God, decisively present in the cross as the rule of Christ's love, and continually active in the working of the Spirit as the word of the cross is proclaimed and received." [5]

18-19. *reconciled us...ministry of reconciliation...reconciling the world...message of reconciliation*: "three things: (a) that God...was reconciling the world to himself; (b) that Christ was the agent of this reconciliation; and (c) that reconciliation means *not charging* trespassers with *their trespasses*." [6] See also Romans 5:11; Colossians 1:20; Ephesians 2:16.

20. *we are ambassadors*: "We": Paul and his associates. "the term...[ambassadors] were used in the Greek-speaking part of the Roman Empire for an official representative of Caesar (Latin: *legatus*).... 'envoys' sent by the Jews on official business." [7]

*for Christ*: "Not just 'on his behalf,' nor, on the other hand, 'in his place,' as if he were not present. Rather, the phrase...must be interpreted... 'with the full of authority of Christ who has sent me.'" [8]

21. *he made him to be sin who knew no sin*: "This is precisely the paradox, that the sinless one as such was made a sinner.... Just as believers are 'just' because God regards ('reckons') and treats them as such, though they are sinners, so Christ is regarded and treated by God as sinner...though he is sinless." [9]

### **Luke 15:1-3, 11b-32**

{1} Now all the tax collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to him. {2} And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, "This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them." {3} So he told them this parable:... {11b} "There was a man who had two sons. {12} The younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of the property that will belong to me.' So he divided his property between them. {13} A few days later the younger son gathered all he had and traveled to a distant country, and there he squandered his property in dissolute living. {14} When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that country, and he began to be in need. {15} So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs. {16} He would gladly have filled himself with the pods that the pigs were eating; and no one gave him anything. {17} But when he came to himself he said, 'How many of my father's hired hands have bread enough and to spare, but here I am dying of hunger! {18} I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; {19} I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands."' {20} So he set off and went to his father. But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him. {21} Then the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' {22} But the father said to his slaves, 'Quickly, bring out a robe--the best one--and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. {23} And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; {24} for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!' And they began to celebrate. {25} "Now his elder son was in the field; and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. {26} He called

one of the slaves and asked what was going on. {27} He replied, 'Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fattened calf, because he has got him back safe and sound.' {28} Then he became angry and refused to go in. His father came out and began to plead with him. {29} But he answered his father, 'Listen! For all these years I have been working like a slave for you, and I have never disobeyed your command; yet you have never given me even a young goat so that I might celebrate with my friends. {30} But when this son of yours came back, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him!' {31} Then the father said to him, 'Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. {32} But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found.'"

*1. the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling:* The attitude of the Pharisees is natural: why would Jesus compromise his own purity and righteousness by showing hospitality to sinners?

*3. this parable:* In the biblical context "this parable," is the parables of the lost sheep (verses 4-7), and its parallel, the parable of the lost coin (verses 8-10), which precede the parable of the prodigal son. The last parable illustrates the point made more succinctly in the first two, namely, "there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance." We need to remember that *this* parable was told to counter the grumbling of the Pharisees and their scribes because Jesus welcomed sinners and ate with them. The point of the readings this Sunday is that God's forgiveness comes to people in different ways at different times, whether they deserve it or not. The prodigal son surely does not deserve his father's love and forgiveness.

*15-16. to feed the pigs...the pods that the pigs were eating:* It is hard to imagine a more desperate situation for a Jew to be found in, feeding pigs and envying their food. It heightens all the more the contrast between the father's love for his disobedient, dishonored and despised, pig-feeding son, and the attitude of the grumbling Pharisees. It is this ministry of reconciliation that is also ours.

*28. he became angry and refused to go in:* "He," the elder son, displays the same attitude of self-conscious rectitude that the Pharisees and the scribe showed in verse 1. There are, other illustrations of this attitude in the Bible. For example, Jonah, with good reason is angry with Yahweh for accepting the repentance of the Ninevites (Jonah 4:1 ff.).

*31-32:* The father acknowledges his son's worth and reaffirms his love for him. But he loves all his children, even the one who dishonored himself, his family, even his whole community. Although Jesus does not describe the father's actions as metaphors for the actions of Yahweh, we are surely able to understand the conclusion to the parable in the form of "from lesser to greater." See, for example, Matthew 7:11, "If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask him!" If a human father will be reconciled with his prodigal son, how much more will God be reconciled with tax collectors and sinners. Like the grumbling elder son, the Pharisees and scribes will be on the outside looking in.

## Reflection

Last Sunday the second lesson viewed the manna as a sort of anticipation of the Lord's Supper. In the lesson this Sunday, the manna ceases when the first Passover was celebrated in the promised land. The eucharist will also cease "when it finds its fulfillment in the messianic banquet of the kingdom of God." [10]



The psalmist sings for joy that God has forgiven him/her the sins and transgressions that have prevented forgiveness, and encourages others to confess their sins as (s)he has done. This has happened through Christ. God has made him to be sin, and the recipient of our separation from God's presence "so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."

Jesus admonishes us to "love your enemies, do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return. Your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High; for he is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. "Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven" (Luke 6:34-37). The way the parable plays out, it is the righteous who are excluded, indeed who exclude themselves from God's presence, since God welcomes the lost who are found. I wonder who God will find more joy in than me...?!

When we deal with grace, forgiveness, repentance and confession we are in deep water. We are no longer in the arena of reciprocity which governs most of our lives. Instead we are in the presence of God and subject to his sovereign joy. The parable of the workers in the vineyard in Matthew 20 puts us in the same territory, and offers a similar principle: if we are going to exchange your righteousness for God's love we will get what we deserve; if we put ourselves at the mercy of God, we will get what Christ deserved.

## Hymns [\[11\]](#)

*With One Voice* (e.g. 762v), *Hymnal Supplement* 1991 (e.g. 725s) and *LBW* (e.g. 32).  
E=Entrance; D=Hymn of the Day; I=First Lesson, P=Psalm; II=Second Lesson; G=Gospel

291 --E--Jesus Sinners Will  
298 --D--One There Is,  
484 --P--God, My Lord, My  
792s --P--Thy Holy Wings  
(741v)  
194 --II--All Who Believe  
781v --II--My Life Flows

662v --II--Restore in Us  
304 --G--Today Your Mercy  
733v --G--Our Father  
734v --G--Softly and  
Tenderly  
714v --G--The Thirsty Fields  
196, 315, 393, 372

## Prayers of the People [\[12\]](#)

P or A: The Lord invites us to his table, though we are sinners and unworthy of his grace. In sincere humility, let us bring the concerns of our church and our lives to his care. Praying in Jesus' name, we respond "Amen."

A: We, your church in Christ, are a new creation. Enable all Christians to be true ambassadors for Christ, leading our communities with love, justice, and integrity that may be a model for the communities of the world. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

A: Your Son ate with sinners and outcasts, showing them the love that their brothers and sisters had denied them. Inspire us to live as did your Son, by sharing our lives and love with those who have known the disgrace of gossip, stigma, or cruelty. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

A: We pray for the sick and the dying in our midst, especially \_\_\_\_\_ and all those whom we name in our hearts. Deliver them from their suffering with your comforting hand. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

A: As you lifted the disgrace of Egypt's slavery from the Israelites, so too do you lift the heavy weight of our sin when we call to you in repentance. As we pause in

silence, hear the penitent prayers of our hearts. (silence). In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

A: Like the prodigal son, we are welcomed back to your banqueting table as we repent of our sinful ways. Encourage us to live lives that are pleasing to you. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

P: With hopeful hearts we commend our prayers to your care as you have invited us to do through your Son, Jesus Christ. We pray in his holy name. Amen.

**Or** [\[13\]](#)

*Presider or deacon*

Let us offer prayers to God who has made us a new creation in Christ.

*Deacon or other leader*

For the holy catholic church throughout the world, sharing the death and resurrection of Christ.

For *N* our bishop, for presbyters and deacons and all who minister in Christ, and for all the holy people of God.

For *NN* our catechumen(s) and *NN* their sponsors(s). For all the peoples of the earth and for their leaders. For all who are sick, afflicted, or oppressed. For the dying and the dead.

For our families, friends, and companions, and for all those we love.

Remembering the blessed Virgin Mary, *N*, and all the saints, let us offer ourselves and one another to the living God through Christ.

**To you, O Lord.**

*Presider*

Blessed are you, God of the Israelites, who gives your people food and drink. Receive the prayers we offer this day and invite us to the feast of life. Glory to you for ever and ever.

## **Notes**

[1] J. Alberto Soggin, *Joshua: A Commentary*. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1972, p. 74.

[2] Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalms 1-59: A Commentary*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1988, p. 372.

[3] Rudolf Bultmann, *The Second Letter to the Corinthians*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1985, p. 154.

[4] *Ibid.*, p. 156.

[5] Victor Paul Furnish, *II Corinthians: Translated with Introduction, Notes and Commentary*. New York: Doubleday, 1984, pp. 332-333.

[6] *Ibid.*, p. 334.

[7] *Ibid.*, p. 339.

[8] *Loc. cit.*

[9] Bultmann, *Ibid.*, p. 165.

[10] Reginald H. Fuller, *Preaching the New Lectionary: The Word of God for the Church Today*. Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1974, p. 513.

[11] <http://www.worship.on.ca/text/rc1c0001.txt>

[12] [http://www.worship.on.ca/text/inter\\_c.txt](http://www.worship.on.ca/text/inter_c.txt)

[13] <http://members.cox.net/oplater/prayer.htm>