

Scripture Reflections on Reconciliation



Reflection One

Scripture Reading

Jesus also told them another story:

Once a man had two sons.

The younger son said to his father, "Give me my share of the property." So the father divided his property between his two sons.

Not long after that, the younger son packed up everything he owned and left for a foreign country, where he wasted all his money in wild living.

He had spent everything, when a bad famine spread through that whole land. Soon he had nothing to eat.

He went to work for a man in that country, and the man sent him out to take care of his pigs.

He would have been glad to eat what the pigs were eating, but no one gave him a thing.

Finally, he came to his senses and said, "My father's workers have plenty to eat, and here I am, starving to death!

I will go to my father and say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against God in heaven and against you. I am no longer good enough to be called your son. Treat me like one of your workers.'"

The younger son got up and started back to his father. But when he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt sorry for him.

He ran to his son and hugged and kissed him.

The son said, "Father, I have sinned against God in heaven and against you. I am no longer good enough to be called your son."

But his father said to the servants, "Hurry and bring the best clothes and put them on him. Give him a ring for his finger and sandals for his feet.

Get the best calf and prepare it, so we can eat and celebrate. This son of mine was dead, but has now come back to life. He was lost and has now been found." And they began to celebrate.

The older son had been out in the field. But when he came near the house, he heard the music and dancing.

So he called one of the servants over and asked, "What's going on here?"

The servant answered, "Your brother has come home safe and sound, and your father ordered us to kill the best calf."

The older brother got so angry that he would not even go into the house.

His father came out and begged him to go in. But he said to his father, "For years I have worked for you like a slave and have always obeyed you. But you have never even given me a little goat, so that I could give a dinner for my friends. This other son of yours wasted your money on prostitutes. And now that he has come home, you ordered the best calf to be killed for a feast."

His father replied, "My son, you are always with me, and everything I have is yours.

But we should be glad and celebrate! Your brother was dead, but he is now alive. He was lost and has now been found."

(Luke 15:11-32)

Reflection

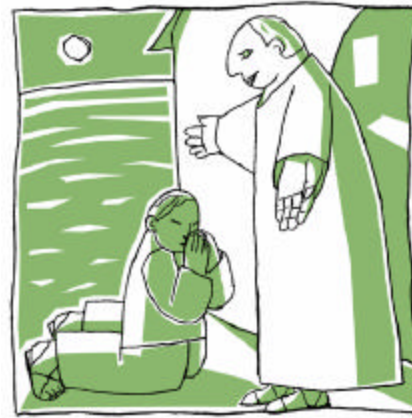
"We have within us both sons. We are at once the pleasure seeking son and the older, duty-bound, overly responsible son. If one identifies primarily with the elder son, one's sinfulness will likely be an exaggeration of conscientiousness, concern for what others think, and a need to be accepted and approved. On the other hand, if one identifies primarily with the younger pleasure seeking son, one's sinfulness will likely be in preoccupation with self and overindulgence. The danger for us, as it was for the sons in the story, is an over identification with either dimension.

There is within us a wonderful potential, more than we could ever dream or imagine. We are invited to claim the gifts each son has to offer us. The elder son holds out for us the strength of stability, perseverance and faithfulness while the younger son is offering us the joys of spontaneity, sensitivity, and creativity.

We are called to come home and claim our gifts. For us, as for the prodigal, to 'come home' means to return to our Father. It is there, in the embrace of his love, that we are unconditionally accepted and our sins are forgiven. All that is fragmented within us is reconciled, and we experience new life."
(*Forgiveness – A Guide for Prayer*. Jacqueline Syrup Bergan & S. Marie Schwan. Winona, MN: St. Mary's Press, 1985, p. 117-118.)

Prayer

Loving God, help us to embrace our sinfulness and giftedness and allow both to be transformed by your generous and ongoing love for us. Call us home when we stray, and give us the courage to admit our foolishness to you. Amen.



Reflection Two

Scripture Reading

Don't be cruel to any of these little ones! I promise you that their angels are always with my Father in heaven. Let me ask you this. What would you do if you had a hundred sheep and one of them wandered off? Wouldn't you leave the ninety-nine on the hillside and go look for the one that had wandered away? I am sure that finding it would make you happier than having the ninety-nine that never wandered off. That's how it is with your Father in heaven. He doesn't want any of these little ones to be lost.

(Matthew 18:10-14)

Reflection

Why go looking for one sheep when you have 99 in front of you that are already taking your time and energy? Jesus is encouraging us to leave the 99 and go looking for the lost one. As Jesus says, "it is not the will of your Father in heaven that one of these little ones should be lost."

As a community we have a responsibility and a role to seek the lost sheep, those who by choice or circumstance have wandered off. Perhaps we offer works of charity and prayers for those who are lost and estranged from us. Perhaps we reach out to the child in the playground who is standing alone. Perhaps

we personally reach out to be in relationship with the hurting and the abandoned.

All in all, it is hopeful to think of the community holding you in prayer and heart when you find yourself lost and adrift from the Shepherd and the community.

Prayer

Shepherd God, help us to pay attention to be able to notice the lost sheep from our community. Give us wisdom and courage to know how to invite them home. Be with us when we are the lost. Amen.

Reflection Three

Scripture Reading

Then early the next morning he went to the temple. The people came to him, and he sat down and started teaching them. The Pharisees and the teachers of the Law of Moses brought in a woman who had been caught in bed with a man who wasn't her husband. They made her stand in the middle of the crowd. Then they said, "Teacher, this woman was caught sleeping with a man who isn't her husband. The Law of Moses teaches that a woman like this should be stoned to death! What do you say?"

They asked Jesus this question, because they wanted to test him and bring some charge against him. But Jesus simply bent over and started writing on the ground with his finger.

They kept on asking Jesus about the woman. Finally, he stood up and said, "If any of you have never sinned, then go ahead and throw the first stone at her!" Once again he bent over and began writing on the ground. The people left one by one, beginning with the oldest. Finally, Jesus and the woman were there alone.

Jesus stood up and asked her, "Where is everyone? Isn't there anyone left to accuse you?" "No sir," the woman answered.

Then Jesus told her, "I am not going to accuse you either. You may go now, but don't sin anymore." (John 8:2-11)

Reflection

The story of the adulteress woman is one that quickly forms a picture in our minds. We can see the people preparing to stone her, the anger and righteousness in their voice. We can imagine the distress and fear of the adulteress woman, wondering if Jesus may be able to save her from her misery. We can see Jesus writing in the dirt, and we may even find ourselves impatient with his response time.

Who are you in the picture? Are you waiting for the first stone to be thrown, wondering why you deserve such a fate for an action that involved another who is not with you now?

Are you full of righteousness, waiting to gleefully fling some stones and cause some pain to another, like a bully in a playground hiding their own weaknesses and fears by publicly teasing someone else's weaknesses?

There's no lecture or scolding from Jesus, just a simple response: If you have no sins go ahead and throw a stone... No one has condemned you and neither do I, go...

What am I going to do? Throw a stone? Walk away in shame? Rush to embrace Jesus for saving me?

Prayer

Gentle reconciling Jesus, it is often easier for me to find fault in another instead of being honest with my own sinfulness. Grant me a heart that sees with compassion and healing. Amen.

Reflection Four

Scripture Reading

As Jesus was leaving, he saw a tax collector named Matthew sitting at the place for paying taxes. Jesus said to him, "Come with me." Matthew got up and went with him.

Later, Jesus and his disciples were having dinner at Matthew's house. Many tax

collectors and other sinners were also there. Some Pharisees asked Jesus' disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and other sinners?"

Jesus heard them and answered, "Healthy people don't need a doctor, but sick people do. Go and learn what the Scriptures mean when they say, 'Instead of offering sacrifices to me, I want you to be merciful to others.' I didn't come to invite good people to be my followers. I came to invite sinners." (Matthew 9:9-13)

Reflection

Do I find myself celebrating Jesus spending time with Matthew or resenting it? Do I have time and space in my life for the estranged, for the seeking, for the hurting? Or do I only want to be with those whose lives are healthy and not at all needy? Who is in my circle of friends— just the popular and strong?

Prayer

Jesus I am sometimes surprised by who you choose to be your friends and disciples. You choose me to come and follow you too. Help me to be worthy of your love and support that I may be a witness of your love and acceptance to the world. Help me to seek out and reconcile the lost and alienated of my community. Amen.

Reflection Five

Scripture Reading

Jesus said to his disciples:

I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts away every branch of mine that doesn't produce fruit. But he trims clean every branch that does produce fruit, so that it will produce even more fruit. You are already clean because of what I have said to you.

Stay joined to me, and I will stay joined to you. Just as a branch cannot produce fruit unless it stays joined to the vine, you cannot produce fruit unless you stay joined to me.

I am the vine, and you are the branches. If you stay joined to me, and I stay joined to you, then you will produce lots of fruit. But you cannot do anything without me. If you don't stay joined to me, you will be thrown away. You will be like dry branches that are gathered up and burned in a fire.

Stay joined to me and let my teachings become part of you. Then you can pray for whatever you want, and your prayer will be answered. When you become fruitful disciples of mine, my Father will be honored. (John 15:1-8)

Reflection

The Virginia creeper vine is a hardy one that has the ability to take over your entire garden and yard if you let it. Some would say it bears a lot of fruit as it grows and spreads so quickly. The challenge is that if you do not cut and prune it on a regular basis it will choke out the garden community that it shares with other plants. You don't want to chop it all down, unless it refuses to live in healthy relationship to the rest of the garden inhabitants. Jesus is challenging us to allow him to prune back that in our lives that is not life giving to others, and therefore to ourselves. If we are unable to reach a healthy ecosystem with those around us, he threatens to chop us down, to challenge us to begin again.

Prayer

Gardener God, your Son prunes us out of love for ourselves and those with whom we live in relationship. Help us to stay rooted in our relationship with you, that we may be witnesses of your prudent and tender care to the world. Amen.

Reflection Six

Scripture Reading

When the Son of Man comes in his glory with all of his angels, he will sit on his royal throne. The people of all nations will be brought before him, and he will separate

them, as shepherds separate their sheep from their goats.

He will place the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. Then the king will say to those on his right, "My father has blessed you! Come and receive the kingdom that was prepared for you before the world was created. When I was hungry, you gave me something to eat, and when I was thirsty, you gave me something to drink. When I was a stranger, you welcomed me, and when I was naked, you gave me clothes to wear. When I was sick, you took care of me, and when I was in jail, you visited me."

Then the ones who pleased the Lord will ask, "When did we give you something to eat or drink? When did we welcome you as a stranger or give you clothes to wear or visit you while you were sick or in jail?"

The king will answer, "Whenever you did it for any of my people, no matter how unimportant they seemed, you did it for me."

Then the king will say to those on his left, "Get away from me! You are under God's curse. Go into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels! I was hungry, but you did not give me anything to eat, and I was thirsty, but you did not give me anything to drink. I was a stranger, but you did not welcome me, and I was naked, but you did not give me any clothes to wear. I was sick and in jail, but you did not take care of me."

Then the people will ask, "Lord, when did we fail to help you when you were hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in jail?"

The king will say to them, "Whenever you failed to help any of my people, no matter how unimportant they seemed, you failed to do it for me."

Then Jesus said, "Those people will be punished forever. But the ones who pleased God will have eternal life."
(Matthew 25:31-46)

Reflection

The old grocery list of sins we often were encouraged to create as we approached the sacrament of penance years ago was often a list of the sins we had committed, as opposed to the actions we had neglected to undertake. Jesus is boldly challenging us here to examine the areas of our life that we are not doing enough. Are we feeding the poor? Are we daring to examine how we contribute to poverty, homelessness, unemployment, etc.? Are we being hospitable to those whom we do not know? Are we sharing our possessions so that all may have clothing, shelter, and the resources they need? Are we seeing Christ in every person we meet?

Prayer

Jesus you do not allow us to stay where we feel comfortable, but challenge us to reach out to the poor and the oppressed as you did. You also challenge us to examine how our own actions contribute to the reality of sin in the world and how we are called to work for change so that all may have what they need in their lives. Walk with us as we walk with others. Amen.

Reflection Seven

Scripture Reading

One of the teachers of the Law of Moses came up while Jesus and the Sadducees were arguing. When he heard Jesus give a good answer, he asked him, "What is the most important commandment?"

Jesus answered, "The most important one says: 'People of Israel, you have only one Lord and God. You must love him with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength.' The second most important commandment says: 'Love others as much as you love yourself.' No other commandment is more important than these." (Mark 12: 28-32)

Reflection

Loving God seems easy, loving self and loving neighbors raises the challenge several notches. When you think of God as being in your neighbor then even the loving God commandment takes on a whole new level of challenge.

Loving God, others, and self with every ounce of your being – is that possible? Yes, but only through the grace, humor, and patience of God. Approaching reconciliation through the lens of love is really quite simple: in all the areas of my life how have I loved? how have I failed to love?

Prayer

Reconciling God, the simple choice and act of loving is a challenging one. Help us to love others as you continue to love us, that we may be amazed again and again with the power of your love for the world. Amen.

