

of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to Himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them.

"In Christ" — a person who becomes a Christian believer is united with Jesus both in His death and in His resurrection, in the old life put to death, and the new, regenerated, spiritual life received.

"The new creation" — the person who chooses to become a Christian has a spiritual transformation which can be seen in a changed manner of life, living for Christ rather than for themselves and seeing others with the eyes of faith rather than worldly judgment. It's not just reforming the old nature; it's living as a recreated being.

19-21 And He has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making His appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's

SUMMARY This short passage contains a clear and concise statement of the gospel, the good news of how our selfish attitude and independence, so offensive to God, is exchanged for a new identity and way of being, made possible by Jesus' self-sacrifice on the Cross.

APPLICATION We cannot share with others what we have not experienced ourselves, but equally we can hardly be shy of talking about the change we have experienced through finding reconciliation with God. We have different gifts and personalities, but we all share the ministry of the new covenant to others.

QUESTION *How practised are you at sharing briefly the story of how you found reconciliation with Almighty God through deciding to believe and trust Jesus?*

PRAYER Father, Your gracious generosity to us is still astounding.

We marvel how you could reach out to us who were so undeserving and give us what we could not possibly earn.

This is good news, and we want to live it to the full and tell it to all we meet.

But we need some holy boldness – and openings.

Help us to be generous and accepting to others who do not share our values or lifestyle – remembering how we once were. We thank You again, Jesus. Amen.

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behalf: Be reconciled to God. God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God.

"Committed to us the message of reconciliation" – Paul is the prophetic minister of God's new covenant with those who will trust Christ to free them from the power of sin. And we all share that ongoing ministry.

• **For further study:** *the power of sin, Isaiah 52:6-10; Romans 10:15, 2 Cor. 5:14-15; the 'peace treaty' and new covenant, Isaiah 53:5, 2 Cor 3:4-6.*

"In Him we might become the righteousness of God" — Jesus, the only entirely righteous One, took our sin on Himself, suffering the punishment and alienation we deserved at the Cross, and by a marvellous exchange made it possible for us to receive His righteousness and be reconciled to God. Believers are given a new right-standing in the divine court, the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith, Philippians 3:9.

The Living Word

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PRINT EDITION

Bible readings for March 27, 2022 commentary & references

Non-denominational Bible study for **Sunday, March 27** (Revised Common Lectionary readings)

Prepare: read the Bible passages beforehand. Reflect: re-read to think about the message preached

Theme: **God's generous exchange**

Verses from Psalm 32 – Setting the scene

Joshua 5:9-12 – The end of the manna and start of food from crops

Luke 15:1-3, 11-32 – The story of the lost son welcomed back

2 Corinthians 5:16-21 – We carry the good news of reconciliation

Joshua 5:9-12 – The end of the manna and start of food from crops

The Israelites celebrate another miracle crossing with a wave offering

9 Then the Lord said to Joshua, "Today I have rolled away the reproach of Egypt from you." So the place has been called Gilgal to this day.

"Reproach" — the shame, not only of being enslaved, but also the cost to God's reputation.

"Gilgal" — sounds like the Hebrew word for circle, wheel or roll.

10 On the evening of the fourteenth day of the month, while camped at Gilgal on the plains of Jericho, the Israelites celebrated the Passover.

"The Passover" — first celebrated shortly before Israel left Egypt and now, at the same time of Aviv (barley ripening or spring), shortly after they crossed the Jordan.

• **For further study:** read Exodus 12, Leviticus 23:5.

11 The day after the Passover, that very day, they ate some of the produce of the land: unleavened bread and roasted grain.

"Produce of the land" — the basic food they found in Canaan was the barley that ripened at this time of year.

"Unleavened bread and roasted grain" — following the Passover they celebrate the Festival of Unleavened Bread which recalls the hasty departure from Egypt with no time for yeast to work.

12 The manna stopped the day after they ate this food from the land; there was no longer any manna for the Israelites, but that year they ate the produce of Canaan.

Verses from Psalm 32 – Setting the scene

Attributed to David

1 Blessed is the one whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered.

2 Blessed is the one whose sin the Lord does not count against them and in whose spirit is no deceit.

3 When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long.

4 For day and night Your hand was heavy on me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer.

5 Then I acknowledged my sin to You and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the Lord." And You forgave the guilt of my sin...

10 ...Many are the woes of the wicked, but the Lord's unfailing love surrounds the one who trusts in Him.

11 Rejoice in the Lord and be glad, you righteous; sing, all you who are upright in heart!

SUMMARY This is celebrating the end of 40 years in the wilderness, and the new start in a land of plenty.

APPLICATION This short story introduces the overall story of God's generous exchange. The temporary subsistence of the desert years has been replaced by His new provision, and the shame of being slaves and refugees has been rolled away in a new sense of being in the place where they belong.

QUESTION We often celebrate new beginnings. How much do we see them as God-given?

Luke 15:1-3, 11-32 – The story of the lost son welcomed back

The forgiving love shown by the father shows God's priority of the lost

1-3 **Now the tax collectors and sinners were all gathering around to hear Jesus. But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them."** Then Jesus told them this parable:

"Tax collectors and sinners" — all three 'lost and found' stories in Luke 15 stories explain why Jesus shared life with people that the Pharisees despised.

11-12 **"There was a man who had two sons. The younger one said to his father, 'Father, give me my share of the estate.' So he divided his property between them.**

"He divided his property" — a family property might be allocated to the sons with the father retaining an income, but for the younger son to want his share early was insulting.

13 **"Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living.**

"Set off for a distant country" — with his share in cash, he emigrated with no thought of returning, like many Judeans seeking a fortune.

14-16 **"After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything.**

"To feed pigs" — considered unclean by Jews, pigs were kept by Gentiles in areas like the Decapolis and beyond. Feeding them and wanting to

share their food is being at rock bottom.

17-19 **"When he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired servants.'**

"Sinned against heaven and against you" — extreme deprivation brought him to his senses, and realisation of his sin against heaven as well as his father, the start of true repentance.

"One of your hired servants" — a hired hand without the rights of a family member.

20 **"So he got up and went to his father.**

"But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.

"He ran to his son" — undignified for an older man but his love for his son overruled.

21 **"The son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.'**

"No longer worthy" — his prepared speech and confession of sin acknowledges that he deserves nothing.

22-24 **"But the father said to his servants, 'Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. For this son of mine was**

dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' So they began to celebrate.

"Bring the best" — the father gives his son a robe of distinction, the signet ring of family authority, and footwear that a servant would not wear. This is in contrast to the religious leaders' contempt for sinners who came to Jesus.

25-27 **"Meanwhile, the older son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. So he called one of the servants and asked him what was going on. 'Your brother has come,' he replied, 'and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.'**

"The older son" — among the story's first hearers, the Pharisees, superior and dismissive of sinners finding repentance, were like the older son while the younger son represents the tax collectors.

28-30 **"The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him. But he answered his father, 'Look! All these years I've been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never**

SUMMARY This is the second of three 'lost and found' stories Jesus told, which speak mainly to the disapproving Pharisees standing apart from those crowding around Jesus, The story brings out the false sense of entitlement of the older brother contrasted with the younger one making no claim but humbly requesting to be forgiven.

APPLICATION Repentance is a change of heart, evidenced by actions that stem from that change. Pride is the barrier and the errant son had to experience a very hard time and be broken to himself before finding the humility to seek change. Then he was given acceptance, in exchange for the shame he was carrying. These stories show Jesus prioritising those that need Him the most, who others would write off and exclude. We must share His priority.

QUESTION *How does the penitent son's speech about being no longer worthy speak to us about how we trust Christ and receive the Father's love?*

2 Corinthians 5:16-21 – We carry the good news of reconciliation

Spiritually recreated through Christ's sacrifice, we have a story to tell

16 **So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer.**

"Worldly point of view" — Paul acknowledges

gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!' "

"All these years" — the older son presents his sense of entitlement, also angry and resentful at the forgiving love shown by the father. He exaggerates his brother's former faults without sharing the joy of his repentance.

31 **"'My son,' the father said, 'you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.'"**

"My son" — the father appeals affectionately to the resentful older son. By implication, Jesus is continuing to invite the Pharisees to change their stance and take hold of the good news.

"This brother of yours" — emphasising his kinship, which the older brother had discounted. Similarly the religious leaders excluded those they judged as sinners even though they were brothers in the Jewish faith.

having a different, unspiritual perspective before his conversion.

17-19 **Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry**