



Fourth Sunday in Lent

27 March 2021

The Episcopal Church of the Good Shepherd in Athens, Ohio--seeking to know and serve Christ in loving service to the campus, the community, and the world.

The Lessons

Lessons for the Fourth Sunday in Lent: Joshua 5: 9-12; Psalm 32; 2 Corinthians 5: 16-21; Luke 15: 1-3, 11b-32.

<https://www.lectionarypage.net>

The Collect

Gracious Father, whose blessed Son Jesus Christ came down from heaven to be the true bread which gives life to the world: Evermore give us this bread, that he may live in us, and we in him; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

The Gospel



Luke 15:1-3, 11b-32

All the tax collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to Jesus. And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, "This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them."

So Jesus told them this parable:

"There was a man who had two sons. 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. 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. When he had

spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that country, and he began to be in need. 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. He would gladly have filled himself with the pods that the pigs were eating; and no one gave him anything. 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! I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands."' 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. 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.' 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. And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!' And they began to celebrate.

"Now his elder son was in the field; and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. He called one of the slaves and asked what was going on. He replied, 'Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has got him back safe and sound.' Then he became angry and refused to go in. His father came out and began to plead with him. 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. But when this son of yours came back, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fatted calf for him!' Then the father said to him, 'Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. 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.'"

The Sermon

Home, in the Best Sense of the Word

It might be said one of the deepest desires in every human heart is the longing for what we call *home* in the best sense of the word. There are hundreds of songs, stories, books, poems, sports, and movies about going home, missing home, hitting home runs, the country roads that take us home, the people that make a place a home, and how there is no place like it. In all of these, home is a concept that is part memory, part nostalgia, part idealism, part belonging, part peace, part joy.

In our best imagining of home, it is where we are welcome, understood, where we make room for each other, where there is forgiveness. It's a place that lets us breathe in all that is good, and we can rest. Home, in the theological sense, is not so much a memory or a location, home is being reconciled or restored to the love that made us all. Home is about relationship with God and each other, as all three readings we heard point to today. Especially the parable Jesus told to address the complaining religious people in today's Gospel.

Often called the parable of the prodigal son, it is perhaps one of the best-known stories Jesus' told. It has been depicted in art by famous artists. Hundreds of pages of

commentary have been written about it. There was even a TV series about a father and son with a very complicated relationship called *Prodigal Son*.

Most of the time, when we listen to or read this long parable, we usually focus on the children, especially the younger son and occasionally the elder son. Sometimes we might look at the extraordinary behavior of the father as evidence that Jesus is telling us we know so very little about God who loves us more than our selfish behaviors.

These are all very well and good lenses through which to view this parable. And parables are stories with many layers to them, giving us much to contemplate about ourselves and God. These lenses have their purpose, but when we focus only on one character, we might fail to notice some of the more subtle details that tie the characters together: the journey away from home, the longing for home, the return home, and the truth that sometimes the person who has lived and worked hard in the same place their whole life doesn't necessarily feel at home. If we step back from focusing on the individual characters in this parable and refrain from trying to guess which one we are, we might see Jesus is addressing our deep spiritual longing, which might explain the popular appeal of this parable over the centuries. So, let's take a break from picking on one of the characters today, and let the story speak in its wholeness. It might help us see how Jesus is trying to tell us a story about how God's longing and ours are one in the same: for home, in the very best sense of the word.

It could be argued this parable of a family sums up the story arch in all the books of the Bible. The story that begins in Genesis with humanity living in paradise. What made it paradise wasn't the tropical weather, it was being in a trusting relationship with God and each other. Humans didn't need things like clothing or housing, farming or grocery stores because they loved and cared for each other. This trust was broken when people decided to use the gift of free will to judge for ourselves what is right or wrong, what is good and what is not good, instead of relying on God.

In breaking that trust we gained something but lost something else. We gained the opportunity to judge for ourselves. At the same time, we lost caring for God and each other. We lost home. Off humans went into the wide world where adventure awaited us. There are many adventures in the Bible. Whenever there were struggles, people would remember their home, that garden where God and humans walked together in the cool of the evening, where there was love and respect, and they would pray for God to remember them and help them, much like the younger son in the parable. Sometimes, like with the elder son in the parable, God would reach out to people, trying to remind them God longs for that relationship we once had to be restored, and God is willing to do whatever it takes to reconcile us back to God's self, even to the point of sharing our human life, dying on a cross, and rising to new life.

In the parable, Jesus uses the sons as characters that represent the break of trust and sense of loss. It is perhaps easier to recognize this in the behavior of the younger son, who wanted his share of inheritance before it was time and went off to do whatever he wanted without any care for anyone but himself. The elder brother may have stayed home, but we see his relationship with his father and his brother is far from loving and respectful. There is no joy in the elder son when his brother returned. He didn't even use the word brother. He never thought about his father's feelings but had no problem expressing his own feelings of jealousy, anger, and resentment. For the elder son, it seems, home was not a place where he felt love, even when personally invited.

Perhaps because it seems he wanted home to be all about him instead of making room for all the people who make any place home. This can make the elder brother seem the

more relatable character for many who struggle or who do not have a healthy home environment. One of the things that became clear for too many couples and families during the pandemic was they don't like being at home. Often because home is not a place of love, but of rejection or abuse or failure to meet expectations no one can. Other times it was just getting on each other's nerves, which is part of family life. But the realization that some relationships were too toxic to last was one of the many reasons the pandemic is painful in more ways than the inconvenience of caring for each other by wearing face masks in public.

Other families and couples grew closer during the pandemic because they were able to adapt to changes and through mutual love and respect got through those times of getting on each other's nerves by caring for each other. Of course, those who live alone faced their own challenges. But whether or not you experienced loneliness or growth during the pandemic, the parable of Jesus shows how important the concept of home, of a place you can go back to or belong is.

In the moment of homecoming, of having his family under one roof again, the father forgave and welcomed his younger son and threw a party to celebrate with the best food and music and dancing. This party is for everyone, but of course the elder brother couldn't find the joy, even when invited. It is perhaps a heartbreaking moment in the parable to see how deeply the father desires his family to be reconciled to him, but the elder brother, while appearing to be faithful, really wants a separate party of his own. And we all know, separate is not equal. The elder son does not want to be in a family that welcomes and forgives, and this rejection hurts both sons and the father, and shows something about reconciliation.

Being reconciled to God means letting God decide who God is going to welcome and forgive. It means letting God be the judge. It means surrendering to the love that is Christ. This does not mean staying in relationships that are harmful, abusive, and toxic. Reconciliation can happen with healthy boundaries and behaviors. Reconciliation starts with turning to God.

Remember today's Gospel began not with the parable, but with the complaints of the religiously righteous who were so focused on the negative, on the harmful behavior of the people turning to God through Jesus' presence and teaching they could not see the beauty in what was happening. There was reason to celebrate, and they didn't want to join the party. Apparently because they were expecting a reward for their behavior that somehow also involved excluding the people they wanted left out. God's kingdom of heaven doesn't work that way. God's kingdom, the home God wants for us all, involves healing those divides and harms between us, however they were formed.

Someone once said to me the hospital is where you get fixed, home is where you heal. This wisdom can apply to this parable that reminds us home is where all who turn to God are welcome to be reconciled to God and each other so that we can create as best we can little bits of home in the best sense of the word wherever we are.

It starts when we confess our sins every Sunday in the worship service. This confession is both communal – confessing the sins of this parish and the church – and individual – confessing our personal sins. Confession is also turning to God, admitting not only what we have done, but the longing within us for the home of God's kingdom and letting God begin the work of healing in us. Healing the tears in the fabric in our being caused by selfishness and greed, anger, jealousy, hate, pride, or regret. Healing that works by letting God love us.

Perhaps the most beautiful part of the parable is the father who sees not the selfish cruelty of his sons, nor the worst things they have done, but people he loves and cares for with all he is and all he has, and that love is what makes home for us all, in the very best sense of the word.

The Fourth Sunday in Lent, March 27, 2022
The Rev. Deborah Woolsey, Church of the Good Shepherd, Athens, OH

Please include in your prayers

In our world, we pray for Justin, Archbishop of Canterbury, and for Michael, our Presiding Bishop; we pray for peace with justice throughout the Middle East. We pray for the victims of the coronavirus.. We pray for all people affected by natural and environmental disasters. We pray also for the people who are suffering from war, especially the people of Ukraine, and all asylum seekers, immigrants and refugees. We pray for Joe our President, Kamala our Vice-President, Mike, our Governor, the Supreme Court and the members of Congress.

In our diocese, In our diocese, we pray for our Provisional Bishop Wayne, the search process for a new bishop, and for Kenneth, Nedi, and Wendell our assisting bishops.

In our parish, we pray for Good Shepherd's continued growth, for our Rector Rev. Deborah Woolsey, for our Associate Priests, Rev. Leslie Flemming, and Rev. David McCoy, for our ministry to students, the university, and the community. We pray for our friends at St. Luke's Episcopal Church in Merida, Mexico.

Those Whom our Prayers are Requested: Belle, Bill S., Bud and Carol, Chris L., Elena, Gloria R., Gordon, Jan S, Lacey, Laura, Miriam, Sharon, Bill, Annie and Kathleen, Tommy, Jeannet Barratt, Danny Cain, Douglas Campbell, Zelma Coleman, Lee Kembell-Cook, Glinnis Davies, Dick Dean and Phyllis Dean, Richard DeNune, Caryl Docherty, Chris Eaton, Ben Foster, Norm Fox, Jan Gault, Jim Greer Jennifer Hall, Debbie Hunsberger, Nancy and Bob Jackson, Peter Kachenko and family, Monya Monroe, Julie Nehls, Linda Nippert, Lauren O'Brien, Doug and Michelle Parsons, Jane Patton, Dale Paul, Dan and Nancy Reedy, Ann Shelly, Michael Vaughn, Consuelo Walker and family, Benjamin Woolsey, Emily Woolsey, Zita Zolpys, and we pray for all who care for them.

**

Birthdays: Julie Nehls (3/27), Amy Larson Dinger (3/29), Zella Nisley (4/1)

** Full names for this section are normally not published online but since there is not a printed Sunday Bulletin or in-house 10:30 service, for the time being we will publish full names unless requested otherwise. If you have a name to be added to the prayer list, Lynn Graham maintains this information. Lynn may be reached at **740-593-5098** or **grahammowery@aol.com**.

At-Home Worship

Christ Church Cathedral Cincinnati live streams via Vimeo its services Sundays at 10 a.m. These are saved and can be watched later without having to log in.

<https://vimeo.com/event/4306>

Though the doors of the National Cathedral in Washington are, like ours, temporarily closed, there's much to explore at the the Cathedral's online portal.

<https://cathedral.org/worship/>

Calendar

Coming Up:

Tuesday, March 29, 5:30 p.m. - - Prayer Vigil for Ukraine

Wednesday, March 30, 12:15 p.m. - - Noontime organ recital during Lent

Sunday, April 3, 10:30 a.m. - - Holy Eucharist

Wednesday, April 6, 12:15 p.m. - - Noontime organ recital during Lent

Sunday, April 10, 10:30 a.m. - - Holy Eucharist, Palm Sunday

Wednesday, April 13, 12:15 p.m. - - Noontime organ recital during Lent

Thursday, April 14, 5:30 p.m. - - Maundy Thursday

Friday, April 15, 7:00 p.m. - - Good Friday

Saturday, April 16, 7:00 p.m. - - Great Vigil of Easter

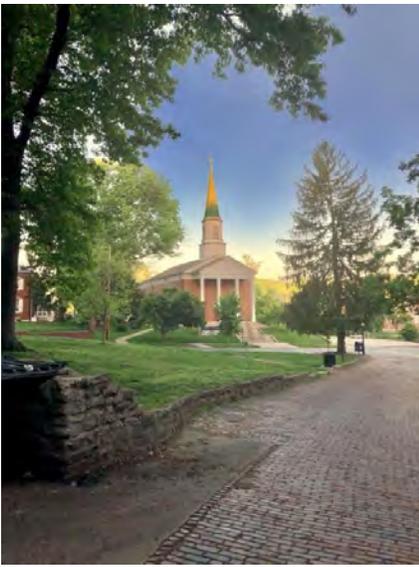
Sunday, April 17, 10:30 a.m. - - Holy Eucharist, Discretionary Sunday

Thursday, April 21, 7:00 p.m. - - Vestry Meeting, ZOOM

Sunday, April 24, 10:30 a.m. - - Holy Eucharist

**CrossRoads Café now open Sundays after church service
and Monday - Friday 9:30 - 11:30 am.**

Notes & Announcements



Noontime organ recitals during Lent, 12:15 p.m.

Members of the Southeast Ohio chapter of the American Guild of Organists are presenting a series of Lenten Organ Recitals on **Wednesdays at 12:15** beginning March 16 and ending on April 13.

Remaining Dates:

Wednesday, March 30 Tony Bruno
Wednesday, April 6 Kathleen Jonas
Wednesday, April 13 Marsha Reilly

The programs are free, at the Church of Good Shepherd, and open to the public.



Prayer Vigil for Ukraine Tuesday, March 29 at 5:30 p.m.

Please join us to pray for peace in Ukraine and Russia. This outdoor prayer vigil will feature prayers, scripture readings, and candle lighting. When it seems like there is little an individual can do, never underestimate the power of prayer.

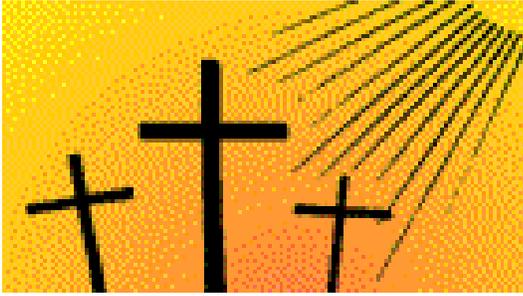
"We pray also for the people who are suffering from war, especially the people of Ukraine, and all asylum seekers, immigrants and refugees."



[Supporting Humanitarian Response to the Crisis in Ukraine](#)



Episcopal Relief & Development
(Click above link for more.)



Holy Week at the Church of the Good Shepherd

We are grateful to be returning to in-person services for Holy Week this year. We invite you to join us for the tradition of observing these days honoring Jesus' triumphant entry in Jerusalem,

the Last Supper, Jesus' Crucifixion, and hope of salvation. Since it has been a while since we have gathered for these traditional liturgies, we are shortening them, allowing us to focus on their core theology while maintaining their beauty and tradition.

Palm Sunday 10:30 am April 10

The service starts outside with the blessing of palm branches to remember Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem.

Maundy Thursday 5:30 pm April 14

This service will focus on the Last Supper and stripping of the altar. We will return to celebrating the Eucharist with both the bread and wine, the Body and Blood of Christ at this service.

Good Friday 7:00 pm April 15

The Stations of the Cross service will feature music and art from artists like the Rev. Karl Stevens and iconographer Kelly Latimore. No walking involved. Music will help us transition between stations.

Great Vigil of Easter 7:00 pm April 16

What do people of faith do in dark times? We do what we have been doing for thousands of years: we light candles, tell our story of salvation, and pray. This year the service will be shorter and includes lighting of the fire and paschal candle, the Exultet, three Old Testament Lessons and the Gospel, and Holy Eucharist in both kinds.


**Mother Deborah will give the prayer the
Workers Memorial Day Remembrance,
Thursday April 28, 2022
12 noon,
at the Workers Memorial Mural
11 N. Court St.**

Please Join us. A box lunch will be provided.

Voting registration for the Primary ends April 5.
The friendly greeter at Athens County Board
of Elections: Pumpkin!

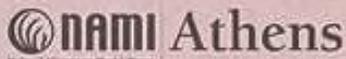




APRIL 2022 FAMILY SUPPORT GROUPS

**APRIL 7TH @ 6PM
APRIL 21ST @ 6PM
VIA ZOOM**

**INFO@NAMIATHENSOHIO
.ORG OR CALL/TEXT
740-249-9249 TO
OBTAIN LINK**

**NAMI Athens**
National Alliance on Mental Illness

[Get Zoom Link Here](#)

Today is Julie Nehl's birthday. She has not broadcast her age, but last year there was a 100th year parade in front of her house for somebody.



Contacts, Information

Quick Links

[Parish website](#)

[Sermons](#)

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Pandemic Notes:

[Link to the DSO guidelines for returning to in-person worship](#)

As of August 5 the Diocese COVID Guidelines request all persons wear masks inside the church building regardless of vaccination status.

Office Hours: 10:00 a.m.– 2:00 p.m.,
Monday through Thursday.
Masks are required.

The **Church Building** is not open for public meetings and gatherings but during office/CrossRoads hours the **thrift shop** and **chapel** are available for individuals.
Masks are required.

CrossRoads Café is only open Sundays after the service until the news school year.

Contact Information

For pastoral needs, please contact The Rev. Deborah Woolsey at 937-689-8895 (cell) or 740-593-6877 (church), or by e-mail at revdebwoolsey@gmail.com.

To find out more about Good Shepherd and other matters, please contact Alex Buckley, Senior Warden, at 740-593-5513 or by e-mail at macbuck@yahoo.com.

For maintenance matters, please leave a note at the office or contact Dana Carlson, Junior Warden, at 740-664-2022 or by e-mail at

[DONATE to Good Shepherd](#)

This takes you to the Parish Home page where you can donate on-line via PayPal. If you have a preference, please indicate on the the "Add special instructions to the seller" section the purpose of the donation -- e.g. organ fund, plate collection, etc.

Check out the Church's

carlsondana@hotmail.com. **For emergencies,** please call The Rev. Deborah Woolsey at 937-689-8895.

NON-emergency messages can be left on the church's answering machine (740-593-6877). The parish office administrator is Barbara Martin (740-593-6877) or barbara@chogs.org.

The Episcopal Church of the Good Shepherd
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Office Hours:

10:00 am - 2:00 pm
Monday - Thursday

Masks are required.
