

Looking to Lent: Facing Indignation

Rev. Cameron D St. Michael – March 30 2025

4th Sunday in Lent

Readings: Joshua 5:9-12; 2 Corinthians 5:16-21; Luke 15:1-3, 11b-32 NRSVUE

Reflection: James 1:19-25

Call to Worship: The one whose wrongdoing is forgiven, whose sin is covered over, is truly happy! The one the Lord doesn't consider guilty—in whose spirit there is no dishonesty—that one is truly happy! You who are righteous, rejoice in the Lord and be glad! All you whose hearts are right, sing out in joy! Praise the Lord! (Psalm 32)

Prayer: Everlasting God, we thank you for the tender mercy you show to all people. We are thankful that you sent your Son, our Savior Jesus Christ, to be of our flesh, and to suffer death on a cross, that all could see and follow the example of his great humility. Help us to overcome the many difficulties that we face in this life. May you always strengthen us by your Holy Spirit that we may face our own indignation because you are with us. Mercifully grant that we can follow the example of patience and love shown to us in Jesus. May we embrace his resurrection that we may know life and have it abundantly. Heavenly Father, watch over us in worship this day. Guide us in singing and prayer by your Spirit. And help us to gather in the peace and the love of Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Reflection: James 1:19-25

¹⁹ You must understand this, my beloved brothers and sisters: let everyone be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger, ²⁰ for human anger does not produce God's righteousness. ²¹ Therefore rid yourselves of all sordidness and rank growth of wickedness, and welcome with meekness the implanted word that has the power to save your souls. ²² But be doers of the word and not merely hearers who deceive themselves. ²³ For if any are hearers of the word and not doers, they are like those who look at themselves in a mirror; ²⁴ for they look at themselves and, on going away, immediately forget what they were like. ²⁵ But those who look into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and persevere, being not hearers who forget but doers who act—they will be blessed in their doing.
(James 1:19-25 NRSVUE*)

We read the words of James, and we hear of how we are called to peace. That we are to avoid anger and indignation in favor of being quick to listen and slow to speak. That we are called in Christ to not just hear the gospel, but to live it. That our actions keep us far from anger because they ground us in God's great love. That we should always be willing to do more as we strive to serve our Risen Savior. How can we turn to Christ to help us overcome anger and resentment? Who can you be lifting up in prayer this week? How will you continue to face your problems this Lent? How can we work together to face them in Christ?

Prayer: Merciful God, we seek your presence with us in this place. We know you are with us in the good and the bad and the unknown. Help us through the easy and the difficult, for we know that your Holy Spirit is our guide and teacher in all circumstances. Today we ask you to help us

to face indignation, knowing our anger can separate us from God's great love. May these forty days be a time of reflection so that we may mend our ways and turn our faces to you, O God. We lift up our prayers to you on this day, knowing that you are always more ready to listen than we are to speak. We lift up the prayers that we voice together and the prayers we keep deep within our hearts. May you guide us, lead us, and strengthen us so that we can face whatever tomorrow may bring. May we remember you in our mourning and our dancing. May we find you in our weeping and our laughter. And may we always remember that whatever we face, we always face it together with your steadfast love and faithfulness. Bless us and keep us that we may walk in the ways of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Now let the words of our mouths, and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

Sermon:

Our scripture readings for today come from the New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition Bible. Our first reading is from Joshua chapter 5, verse 9 through 12.

⁹The 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. ¹⁰While 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. ¹¹On the day after the Passover, on that very day, they ate the produce of the land, unleavened cakes and roasted grain. ¹²The 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. (Joshua 5:9-12 NRSVUE)*

Our next reading is from 2 Corinthians chapter 5, verse 16 through 21.

¹⁶From 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 no longer know him in that way. ¹⁷So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; look, new things have come into being! ¹⁸All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; ¹⁹that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. ²⁰So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ: be reconciled to God. ²¹For our sake God made the one who knew no sin to be sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. (2 Corinthians 5:16-21 NRSVUE)*

Our final reading is from Luke chapter 15, verse 1 through 3 and verse 11b through 32.

***15** Now all the tax collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to him. ²And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, "This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them." ³So he told them this parable:*

¹¹Then Jesus said, "There was a man who had two sons. ¹²The younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of the wealth that will belong to me.' So he divided his assets between them. ¹³A few days later the younger son gathered all he had and traveled to a distant region, and there he squandered his wealth in dissolute living. ¹⁴When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that region, and he began to be in

need. ¹⁵ So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that region, who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs. ¹⁶ He would gladly have filled his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, and no one gave him anything. ¹⁷ But when he came to his senses 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 as 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 fatted 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 assets with prostitutes, you killed the fatted 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.' " (Luke 15:1-3, 11b-32 NRSVUE*)

This is the word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God.

As we come towards the end of our Lenten series, we reach indignation. This might be a hard one to describe at first. I based this around the parable of the Prodigal Son, because both sons exhibit signs of not being happy with what they have and being upset at the situation they are in. The reason I focused on the indignation is because it ties back in to the reason Jesus was telling the particular parable. Both brothers think they deserve more because of greed. They are upset, not at what was done to them, but upset because of what they felt they deserved. We can get tunnel vision when we get upset, blinding us to the good and blinding us to what is happening around us.

I think that's what we see in our reading from the Gospel of Luke. Because this is a response to the indignation of the scribes and the Pharisees, the religious and legal experts. The entire parable is told as a response to their grumblings that Jesus welcomes sinners. They are indignant over the fact that Jesus welcomes people they don't want to welcome. It upsets them that he is willing to spend his time with people they think are unworthy. I think they're upset because they think all of that focus should go to them. They are the supposed to be the righteous ones. They think they are following the rules, so they are upset at these sinners getting all the attention. What's interesting about this is the role they take on within this parable. They are represented by the oldest son. So often we miss that both sons in this parable are lost and they need help. And there's a lot here that's dealing with change. And we see some of that

change in our other readings. That we have to adapt. That when the Israelites came in from the wilderness, they had to adapt to no longer having manna to eat and having to live once again off the land. That Paul talks about how we have to adapt to this new creation in Christ. How we have to recognize people in Christ through Christ, not by human standards. Because human standards are what we see with the Pharisees and the legal experts grumbling about Jesus eating with sinners.

This is a well-known parable, but I wanted to step through it because there's a few things we might miss. The first is that the younger son is treating his father as if his father is dead. And the father doesn't retaliate. The younger son isn't satisfied with what he has. So, he asks for his share of the inheritance, something he would only get when his father is gone. The younger son is willing to treat his father as if he is already dead just to get what he wants. But his father still loves him. He takes his wealth, and he leaves, and he wastes it. He soon finds a new unhappiness. First, he was indignant over having to stay with his father, only having what his father provided. When he got what was coming to him if his father were dead, he wasted it. And now that he's working and seeing that things aren't good, he remembers his father's hired hands. He remembers his father's generosity. He decides to return and to humble himself before his father and request that he be taken on, not as a son, but as a hired hand. Now, when he gets there, his father rushes to him and welcomes him with open arms. He forgives the son that counted him as dead. The son tries to go through with his plan by saying that he had sinned against his father and no longer deserved to be called a son. And the father won't hear it. The father asks for the best robe, a ring to be put on his son's finger, and sandals on his feet. He is going to celebrate. This son that was dead is now found.

This causes new problems. One of the problems is that the oldest son is now upset because he hears his younger brother is back. He hears about the party being thrown to celebrate, and he is now indignant. He is invited to take part in the music and the dancing, but he refuses to take part. He will not celebrate. He tells his father that he has worked like a slave and that nothing has ever been done for him. Now his brother, this sinner, has returned to the father and is welcomed back. The fatted calf is killed for him. The father's explanation is that he tells the older brother that his brother was dead and now has come back to life. He was lost and has been found. But he also says something else here. And this is something that really matters for us to understand. It helps us to understand that the outrage from the older son is not warranted. Because his father tells him that all that was his also belongs to the oldest son. He doesn't mean it figuratively. If we look back, the father divided the inheritance between his two sons. Meaning the older son already has access to everything they own. He has his share of the inheritance. But he has refused to celebrate himself or his father. In his indignation about his brother's treatment, he doesn't think about how he's never done anything for his father. He has never celebrated the fact that his father is with him. He has never celebrated his father's love. He has never celebrated his father's compassion. He has done none of these things. He hasn't celebrated himself. He expected someone else to do it for him. He expected everything to be handed to him. The father reminds him that he already had the means to celebrate. But that he is now celebrating because his son was lost and as good as dead before, and now he has returned.

One of the things I wanted to touch on with this is that the older brother in this is the one sitting in for the Pharisees, the scribes, the legal and religious experts. Because they have

everything already. They have the power. They perceive themselves to be righteous. And yet they get upset when they see someone else being treated well. Because it's not them. It is pure selfishness on their part. They see Jesus as someone sitting and eating with sinners, welcoming only sinners. Whereas Jesus sees this as people who need God's help. Jesus sees them as people who are in need of God's care. The Pharisees and scribes are indignant for the same reason the older brother was. Because they feel they're the ones that deserve all the special treatment. Even though they won't lift a finger to do anything for themselves, nor anyone else. Nobody has told them they cannot celebrate their righteousness. No one has told them that they are not welcome to sit and dine with Jesus. They are invited to the table the same as everyone else. The problem that they have is they don't want to share that table. They want to be the only ones invited. Just like how the older son wants to be the only one invited to his father's banquet. He doesn't want to share it with his brother. Just as his younger brother didn't want to share what he had with his father. Both of them get caught up in their own selfishness and miss their father's love. It is God that sits in place of the father in this parable. The sinners have gone astray because they didn't trust to share what they had with God. They squander what they have, and God still forgives them and welcomes them back. Then God invites those who have been following to welcome these people back to him. To share in that celebration. To share in the joy of recovering someone who is lost. And the legal experts and the Pharisees become indignant and refuse to celebrate. Because it is not about them. Because it is not enough for them to be invited to the table. The table has to be set for them and them alone.

This kind of selfishness is one of the things that we have to fight and overcome. Because too often if it is not for us then no one deserves it. Too often if we do not benefit then no one should benefit. We feel that we followed the rules so forgiving someone who didn't is unfair. That is not how it works. Because God reminds us that we are all called to the table. Because all have fallen short. That life is full of changes and adapting. That we can't regard each other from a human view. We have to regard each other through Christ. We should see each other how he sees us. Because he sees us as worthy of a spot at the table. He sees us as being reconciled to himself. He sees us as those in need of forgiveness. And that is how we have to be able to see ourselves. Because when we see ourselves all as equal in Christ in needing love and in needing forgiveness, we overcome indignation so that we can share in love and support. I pray that as we continue to reflect on our actions this Lent, that we remember that we are all sinners in need of God's love and forgiveness. That we all have both gone astray and all have fallen short of what God has called us to do. So let us not squander our inheritance as the younger brother. And let us not turn our backs on God because of our indignation towards our fellow man, as the older brother. But let us celebrate as Christ celebrates. That we may love as he loves and care as he cares. And that with Christ we may overcome any obstacle that stands in our way. Even if that obstacle is our own heart. Amen.

Prayer of Confession and Pardon: God, you are with us even when we turn away from you. Guide us back into your loving arms. Judge us not by the perfection of our actions but show us mercy and love. We have strayed like lost sheep from your ways, failing both in what we have done and what we have failed to do. Bring us back into your fold that you may guide us and lead us in all things. For the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ, have mercy upon us and forgive us. May we walk in your love and trust your ways. Amen.

Almighty God have mercy upon you. May the Lord forgive all your sins and lift you up in love through Jesus Christ our Lord, and by the Holy Spirit keep you in life eternal. Amen.

Offering: If you are so moved to make an offering, you may send it to the church treasurer, or you may send it to the PO Box listed below. We are still the church, and the church still needs your support to keep doing all the important work that we do.

Lord's Prayer

Dismissal with Blessing: May we go forth reflecting God's love in our lives as we go forth in the peace of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Our Current Series – Looking to Lent

This series is a 5-week series plus Ash Wednesday and in it we will be discussing the various issues we face in life. Lent is a time of reflection and letting go, and as such we will be reflecting on the mindsets we can leave behind this year. We will discuss what we give up and what we take up when we face doubts, temptation, adversity, presumptions, indignation, and expectations during Lent. As we look to lent, we are reminded that we face everything with Christ.

3/5: Facing Doubt

3/9: Facing Temptation

3/16: Facing Adversity

3/23: Facing Presumptions

3/30: Facing Indignation

4/6: Facing Expectations

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Worship 8:15am

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