

**FOURTH SUNDAY OF LENT
Year C March 10, 2013**

Theme: Tough Reconciliation

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We have just heard what is undoubtedly a masterpiece from the teaching ministry of Jesus of Nazareth: the Parable of the Forgiving Father or, more popularly, the Prodigal Son.

In its story but especially in its characters, the parable powerfully lays out Jesus' teaching on forgiveness.

In the character of the father, we see unbounded love, even in the face of a son's arrogance and stupidity;

---we see enduring love as the father runs to his returning son with outstretched arms and extravagantly generous welcome.

---we also see patient, teaching love as he coaxes his eldest son into the party not merely for a lost son, but also for a lost brother.

In the character of the youngest son, we see sinners at their worst: self-centered, uncaring about how their actions hurt others.

Even the decision to return home is for a selfish reason – to eat – and with a well-rehearsed excuse in hopes of a job.

But it is really the character of eldest son who was the focus of the parable in the first place.

Remember the context in which the Gospel writer Luke set the story:

“Tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to listen to Jesus, but the Pharisees and scribes began to complain....”

By eating with them, Jesus was welcoming the “tax collectors and sinners” back to the Father’s house; the “Pharisees and scribes” were the elder son outside pouting.

While bashing Pharisees and scribes is easy, we also have to recognize how the parable pulls us into the story and how we in some sense feel the elder son’s pain.

Reconciliation after serious hurt is no quick and easy matter is it?

Imagine the scars left when the younger son packed up and went away:

---the hurt and financial turmoil when he asked for his share of the inheritance before his father was dead;

---the pain to the father not knowing where his youngest son was; if he was healthy and well;

---the resentments of the elder brother toward the younger for the pain caused the father and for all the work he was left to do.

Reconciliation after such hurt requires more than simply: “Oh, yeah, kid brother’s home. Let’s have a party.”

How do you deal with the resentment and bitterness?

How do you overcome the anger built up over time?

Any of us who have experienced serious hurt in our lives and have had to face such reconciliation know what it is like.

And we can know reconciliation from either side of the equation: from the one who has caused the hurt and must ask for forgiveness and healing,

....or from the one who has been hurt and must give the forgiveness.

Often reconciliation is a process which cannot be accomplished with a simple “I’m sorry” or “I forgive you” – a wide variety of emotions and experiences must be faced and dealt with.

So many people have to deal with emotional, physical and even sexual abuse from childhood and still carry with them the hurt and pain of those experiences – never having had the opportunity or perhaps never allowing themselves the opportunity for reconciliation.

Others must reconcile hurt in families and marriage, or over the loss of a job or failed relationships, sometimes the defeat of a project or special idea.

The process of healing memories can, of course, be extremely painful because it may require us to revisit hurtful experiences we have tried to banish from our consciousness.

And, then, how can there be reconciliation when the person or persons involved may be deceased or distant or otherwise inaccessible.

From personal experience, I have been challenged to forgive a particular hurt when the other party does not acknowledge ever causing any hurt.

Years later that hurt continues to gnaw at me and cause pain and anger to this day.

What do you do with all that pain and anger: many say “just let go of it; get on with life; don’t let it destroy you.”

But that’s easier said than done: reconciliation is not as simple as saying, “Yeah, let’s all just go into the party.”

But if you just let anger and hatred grow, you yourself become the one who pays the price not the other person.

The author Malachy McCourt had a wonderful comment on this: [“Having resentment is like taking poison and waiting for the other person to die.”](#)

Ah, but there's the rub: working through and then letting go of the resentment, and moving to reconciliation.

The forgiving father asked it of his eldest son: come into the party for your brother is home.

Jesus asked it the scribes and Pharisees: welcome the tax collectors and sinners back to God's house.

Christ asks it of us today: be reconciled to one another.

I'm working on it, Lord, but I'm not there yet.