

# THE HOPE JOURNAL

LEARNING TO LOVE, TOGETHER

March 27, 2022



## FORGIVENESS

*and the power we refuse to use*

by Drew Downs

This week's gospel is a famous story of forgiveness. In it, a father forgives a son who has left the family and miraculously returns.

The older brother, however, isn't thrilled with the idea. Who can blame him? He stayed when the other left; he worked and the other played. It's a story that's abundantly familiar.

It is also one of the most powerful stories of forgiveness. Precisely because the father has

no logical reason to forgive. Not in the earthly sense. But as a father, he sees the potential to get his son back as infinitely more important than maintaining a grudge.

The father, of course, has all the power in the relationship. And forfeits it to have his son back. This is why forgiveness is so hard. When we're in such a situation, do we share our own power by forgiving the undeserving? Or do we refuse to use it?

# AFTER THE EPIPHANY

*Winter 2022*

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## WHAT'S GOING ON

*"You know we've got to find a way  
To bring some loving here today".*

-Marvin Gaye

Disciples, Apostles, and Saints!

As we continue on our Lenten journey, asking ourselves the question: *What Is Our Tomorrow?* I hope you are finding the time of discernment appropriately challenging and fulfilling!

In recent years, much of our approach to such matters has taken place in very structured forms (programs) or in directed ways (priest-led) *and* with an eye toward *reaction* ("here's what I like \_\_\_").

This year, however, is different. We are guiding this train ourselves. Together. Getting as much or as little out of it as our own effort...and particularly in our effort to reach out and make connections with others. This is **the** skill of the moment; and one that we all need to better develop.

Much of our conversation about the pandemic has occurred in a reactive frame. An individualistic one. One that is geared around preference and practice. And we have often asked ourselves how we might solve a particular conundrum based on how people around us are *feeling*. We have often done this without the same regard for how diverse those *feelings* really are. Or how we can be responsible together. As a community. Led by *all of us*.

If you would like to join us digitally, we will have a second Meet-Up on Zoom next Wednesday, March 30 at 7:00 pm!

With love,  
Drew

# LENT

*Winter 2022*

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## FOR SUNDAY

*The Fourth Sunday of Lent*

March 27, 2022

### **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.**

### **Reading**

From Luke 15:1-3, 11b-32

"He would gladly have filled himself with the pods that the pigs were eating; and no one gave him anything."

### **Reflection**

This parable Jesus tells is of a lost son. We know it as the parable of the Prodigal Son. It is perhaps Jesus's most famous parable. Artists throughout history have tried to capture its essence in paint and music for centuries. It is at once beautiful and tragic.

As a teaching, it relies on a simple idea: that we are bound to compare one another. And we will judge wastefulness as bad and loyalty as good every single time. What better way to write a story to illustrate that dynamic than two sons: the good one and the bad one, the older and the younger, the wise and the impulsive.

So Jesus casts the story perfectly and then upends all of our expectations.

# LENT

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Even when we've read this story a thousand times, we fall for its spell *every time!*

Each reading: the younger sounds petulant and stupid. The older as justified in his hurt. We can't help it. It's automatic.

It is striking when we realize that this is how *everyone* reads it. Because this is how the brothers would have experienced it. And that righteous anger at the younger brother seems less and less just when we imagine that *nobody* has sympathy for him. Nobody, of course, except those that have been in his shoes.

The best line, of course, is the last one. But this one, earlier in the story, carves at my heart: "He would gladly have filled himself with the pods that the pigs were eating; and no one gave him anything."

The younger son, already punished by his actions and his separation, can find neither sympathy, nor a simple hand out. *Nothing at all.* Not a soul anywhere will give him scraps, even trash. Not even one.

The coldness with which we treat the beggar; part skepticism and part disdain; reveals our own sense of moral justification in refusing to be generous. And it reveals the thumb we naturally put on the scale in support of the older brother. That we might assume a man *deserves* to starve. Or perhaps the *fates* should claim him. Even his death would leave the conscience clear, for he brought this upon himself.

These, of course, are not moral positions, but sadistic ones. And it reveals how foreign the father's celebration is from our own hearts. For it is far easier to imagine all the ways the older brother's frustrations make sense (and ought to be excused) than to consider that the younger may be reconciled to the father; that we all ought to celebrate this; and that it is, indeed, a miracle.

It is curious that we might struggle with something so near to God's heart.

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