

Saturday in the Second Week in Lent

March 6, 2021

By the Reverend Stephen Gerth

*Micah 7:14–20**; *Psalms 103:1–8**; *Luke 15:18*; *Luke 15:11–32*

In Lectionary Year A, the Sunday gospel lesson is usually from Matthew, but not in Lent. The first Sunday is Matthew’s telling of Jesus’ temptation in the wilderness. On the other Sundays in Lent, the gospel lessons are from John. On the Second Sunday, we hear of Nicodemus, who seeks out Jesus at night. He does not expect Jesus’ words, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born from above, he [or she] cannot see the dominion of God.”¹

In Rome in Late Antiquity, the gospel lessons now appointed for the last three Sundays in Lent in Year A read on weekdays. They were part of the preparation of adults for baptism. On the third Sunday, we hear Jesus asking a Samaritan woman for a drink of water. It ends up being the most prolonged theological exchange in any of the gospels.² The passage ends with these words, “Many Samaritans said to the woman, ‘It is no longer because of your words that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the Savior of the world.’”³ On the fourth Sunday, the Healing of the Man Born Blind is one of the two lessons I have difficulty reading or chanting without emotion.⁴ The fifth Sunday is the story of the raising of Lazarus, the story that I never finish reading or chanting without having to stop near its conclusion—when Lazarus steps out of the tomb, Jesus says, “Unbind him, and let him go.”⁵

I think it was in 2010 that I first preached on today’s gospel lesson by beginning with Luke’s setting up of the story I learned as a child to call the

¹ John 3:5.

² John 4:1–42.

³ John 4:42.

⁴ John 9:1–38.

⁵ John 11:44.

Parable of the Prodigal Son.⁶ I think it matters for our understanding that one has heard what has gone before.

The whole passage begins with these words, “Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear [Jesus]. And the Pharisees and the scribes murmured, saying, ‘This man receives sinners and eats with them.’”⁷ Jesus responds to the Pharisees and scribes in the presence of the tax collectors and sinners by speaking of a man searching for a lost sheep and the joy he has when he finds the sheep. The first part passage concludes, “And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost.’ Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.”⁸

The following story is of a woman who lost a coin: “And when she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin which I had lost.’ Just so, I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”⁹

And only then does Luke relate the parable of the son who takes his share of his inheritance, loses it, and returns, expecting nothing but to be a laborer in the fields. Instead, his father gives a feast for his returned son. The elder son refuses to join in the celebration. The father leaves the Pharisees, the elders, the tax collectors, and the sinners with these concluding words to the elder son, “It was fitting to make merry and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found.”¹⁰

⁶ Luke 15:11–32.

⁷ Luke 15:1–2.

⁸ Luke 15:6–7.

⁹ Luke 15:9–10.

¹⁰ Luke 15:32.

There's something evangelistic about not letting us know about the elder son's choice. The German theologian Karl Barth gave a Christological interpretation to this parable. He sees God as the Father and the younger son as God's Son, who goes out and loses everything.¹¹ It reminds me of the words found in Mark, Matthew, and Luke, "Some are last who will be first, and some are first who will be last."¹²

✠ In the Name of the Father, and of the Son,
and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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¹¹ <https://leftbehindandlovingit.blogspot.com/2013/03/prelude-to-parable.html>, (accessed 6 March 2021).

¹² Luke 13:30. Also, Mark 10:31; Matthews 19:30.