

My Sermon from last Sunday March 27, 2022, 'Fourth Sunday In Lent' ~

"Be Reconciled To God"

*Through the written word and through the spoken word may we know your living word,
our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.*

There are so many things to think about this morning . . .

Today is the 4th Sunday in Lent. We are already halfway through Lent. Where has the time gone?

Today is **Laetare Sunday** known as the "Sunday of **JOY**." That is why I am wearing pink, my all-time favourite colour. We are taking a moment today to anticipate the **JOY** of Easter.

Today is also "**Mothering Sunday**." This is Mother's Day in England, where already many spring flowers are blooming. I am thankful that Canadian Mother's Day isn't until the 2nd Sunday in May. Hopefully, the snow will be gone by then!! Mothering Sunday has been celebrated in England since the 16th century. People would return home to their parish churches where they were baptized, their "mother church" on this day.

Originally, this celebration day was more about the mother church and not so much about mothers. Today the focus is mainly on mothers.

Our scripture for this Sunday is all about our Lenten journey and being "reconciled to God." This is the scripture that I invite you to ponder and to memorize for this week:

Laetare Sunday



The Fourth Sunday of Lent is called **Laetare Sunday**, from the first words of the Introit at Mass, "Laetare Jerusalem" ('Rejoice, O Jerusalem'). Like Gaudete Sunday midway through Advent, Laetare reminds us of the event we look forward to at the end of the penitential season and the joy in anticipation of the Resurrection. The vestments for this day will be rose, as they are on Gaudete Sunday in Advent.



"Be reconciled to God."
(from 2 Corinthians 5:20)

There are other magnificent parts of the 5 verses from Paul's letter that could absolutely be the verse for you to memorize. In verse 17, we have the Archbishop's Motto for 2022:

"So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!"

Verse 20 contains the foundational motto for St. Paul's, the verse that we strive to live by each and every day:

"We are ambassadors for Christ." We committed to this verse in 2005, nearly 17 years ago when I first arrived at St. Paul's. Ambassadors seek to build relationships and to seek reconciliation. Ambassadors strive for peace and justice and to be compassionate to all others. I think that our **Prime Minister Justin Trudeau** is being a true Canadian Ambassador in the words he spoke this week to the European Parliament. He was a statesman who spoke with authority and with conviction. Trudeau stressed that the European Union and Canada share core values and that these values are now under attack. He went on to stress this: "*We cannot let Ukraine down. They are counting on us.*"

One of the most beloved parables in the gospels is in Luke and is our gospel for this Sunday. It is the parable of the Prodigal Son:

A man had two sons. One son asked for an early inheritance and took the money with him to a distant country where he squandered all the money. He became desperate and eventually took on the only job he could find ~ feeding pigs.

Eventually he decides to reconcile with his father and he returns home, asking for forgiveness. His father has never stopped hoping that his son would return. He forgives his son immediately and celebrates with an elaborate feast because his son is now safe and back home.



St. Paul knew that our spiritual journey involves turning to God. Paul stresses: "***Be reconciled to God.***" In fact, in just 4 verses in 2nd Corinthians, Paul mentions the word 'reconcile' 5 times!! That is how important his message is. When I wish to stress something that I think is important I will say it over and over again. Just ask my husband!!

I encourage you to draw closer to God during Lent and he will draw closer to you. It is actually easier to practise reconciliation with God than with other people because we know that God's reaction to our requests will always be met with love. We can't control other people's reactions if we are estranged from a person and wish to reconcile. The person might snub us or say something mean or cruel from their inner hurt and pain. When we have wronged someone, not everyone will shower us with grace like the woman in the following true story did.

Anita Smith and her husband Ronnie moved to Libya because, "*We saw the suffering of the Libyan people, but we also saw your hope, and we wanted to partner with you to build a better future.*" Ronnie was a chemistry teacher in a Benghazi school.

On December 5, 2013, it all ended during Ronnie's morning jog when he was shot and killed by an unknown gunman. In Anita's letter, she addressed her husband's attacker, saying, "*I love you and forgive you. How could I not? For Jesus taught us to 'love our enemies' – not to kill them or seek revenge.*"

There are not many Anitas in this world who grant forgiveness with so much compassion . . . However, we always know God's reaction. God is always waiting for us to return and is always desiring to meet us with open arms ~ the arms of heaven, the arms of forgiveness, the arms of love.

Just a couple of weeks ago, I was asked to go to the ICU to speak with a woman in her 30's who was very ill. I went up to the ICU and spent time with this woman who had so much to live for. I had never met her before. She wasn't sure if she was going to get better so her deepest desire was to be reconciled to God. She told me the bad things that she had done and that she wanted to draw closer to God, to be forgiven, to change her ways. All she wanted was to have God's forgiveness and for God to welcome her. I gave her absolution and let her know that God's forgiveness was hers and that she was reconciled to God. Her deepest desire had come true. Sadly, this woman died just a week ago. She tried so very hard to live and to get better. But I believe that she went to heaven with a heart that knew forgiveness and reconciliation. The compassionate God that I love stood waiting for her and welcomed her home.

All those things that you try not to think about too much and yet they come into your mind at 3:00 am, can be given to God. Name them. Be like the prodigal son who practised what he would say all the way home: *"Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son."*

Be confident that God will put away all your sins. The author of Psalm 32 got it right. This is our psalm for today:

*"Happy are they whose transgressions are forgiven,
and whose sin is put away."*

The psalmist goes on to say this a few verses later:

*"I will confess my transgressions to the Lord.
Then you forgave me the guilt of my sin."*

Isn't that the truth? It is that guilt that eats us alive for days, weeks, even years.

When we know that we are forgiven, we rejoice in the Lord and we shout for **JOY**. (Psalm 32:12)

Isn't that the key of this 'Sunday of **JOY**', of Laetare Sunday? We rejoice because our deepest desire is to **"be reconciled to God."**

Amen.

Archdeacon Deborah+

