

Lesson Plans that Work
Year C – Fourth Sunday in Lent
Gospel Lesson for Adults

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

The Lord is full of compassion and mercy: Come, let us adore him. (Antiphon for Lent, Book of Common Prayer, page 81.) And what if, during this season of Lent, we sought a deeper understanding of this amazing gospel of grace? Will that image of grace energize us to do the spiritual housekeeping we need to be ready for the "new thing" God is doing in Easter?

A notation for this week's Gospel

Tax collectors, who are sinners, invited to the table? Shocking! So Jesus tells them a story: A son who blows an inheritance and a father who forgives before the son even has a chance to ask. What might we discover about the gospel of grace?

Theme: Amazing Grace

Before Class: This is such a long passage and with so many voices, it would be helpful to make copies of the passage (found at the end of this lesson), and highlight the parts: a narrator, a Pharisee, Jesus, the younger son, the father, a slave, and the older son.

Beginning: Tell the group that the challenge in approaching a piece of Scripture we have heard many times is to listen for new insights we might have missed before.

Opening Prayer: Dear God, we thank you for your amazing capacity for grace and for your patience with us as we strain to understand it. Amen.

The Scripture: Luke 15: 1 - 3, 11b - 32. Ask for volunteers to read the various parts of the passage. Tell the group, that at the conclusion of the reading, we will remain silent for a couple of minutes to reflect on it, allowing time to go back and silently re-read any of it.

Option: Tell them to imagine that it is the day after the party and that the father and both sons are having breakfast together. Discuss what their conversation might have been. Have them look at the possible conversation from all three perspectives. After they have sufficiently discussed it, simply invite them to act out the conversation.

If your group is large enough, you may instead, break into 3 sub groups and give each group the identity of one of the following: the father, the younger son, or the older son. Tell them to discuss from their character's viewpoint what the conversation might have been. After each group has considered what they think would have been said at breakfast, bring the groups together to have the conversation.

Getting Closure: Assure the group that it is not necessary to reach consensus about the table conversation. What happened is not central to the story. Invite the group to discuss what they think the central message of the story is.

Closing Prayer: God, we pray that we who have been reconciled to you may take forth this message of reconciliation that you have entrusted to us. Amen.

Luke 15:1-3, 11b-32

Narrator: Now all the tax-collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to him. ²And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying,

Pharisees and Scribes: ‘This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them.’

Narrator: ³ So he told them this parable:

Jesus: ‘There was a man who had two sons. ¹²The younger of them said to his father,

Younger Son: “Father, give me the share of the property that will belong to me.”

Jesus: So he divided his property between them. ¹³A few days later the younger son gathered all he had and travelled to a distant country, and there he squandered his property in dissolute living. ¹⁴When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that country, and he began to be in need. ¹⁵So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs. ¹⁶He would gladly have filled himself with the pods that the pigs were eating; and no one gave him anything. ¹⁷But when he came to himself he said,

Younger Son: “How many of my father’s hired hands have bread enough and to spare, but here I am dying of hunger! ¹⁸I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; ¹⁹I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands.’ ”

Jesus: ²⁰So 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. ²¹Then the son said to him,

Younger Son: “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.”

Narrator: ²²But the father said to his slaves,

Father: “Quickly, bring out a robe—the best one—and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. ²³And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; ²⁴for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!” And they began to celebrate.

Jesus: ‘Now his elder son was in the field; and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. ²⁶He called one of the slaves and asked what was going on. ²⁷He replied,

Slave: “Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has got him back safe and sound.”

Jesus: ²⁸Then he became angry and refused to go in. His father came out and began to plead with him. ²⁹But he answered his father,

Elder Son: “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. ³⁰But when this son of yours came back, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fatted calf for him!”

Narrator: ³¹Then the father said to him,

Father: “Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. ³²But 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.” ’

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