

# Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church

## Reverend Dr. Daris Bultena

**March 14, 2010**  
**4<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Lent**

Joshua 5:9-12

<sup>9</sup>The LORD said to Joshua, "Today I have rolled away from you the disgrace of Egypt." And so that place is called Gilgal to this day.

<sup>10</sup>While the Israelites were camped in Gilgal they kept the passover in the evening on the fourteenth day of the month in the plains of Jericho. <sup>11</sup>On the day after the passover, on that very day, they ate the produce of the land, unleavened cakes and parched grain. <sup>12</sup>The manna ceased on the day they ate the produce of the land, and the Israelites no longer had manna; they ate the crops of the land of Canaan that year.

Luke 15:1-3, 11b-32

<sup>1</sup>Now all the tax collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to him. <sup>2</sup>And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, "This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them."

<sup>3</sup>So he told them this parable:

<sup>11b</sup>"There was a man who had two sons. <sup>12</sup>The younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of the property that will belong to me.' So he divided his property between them. <sup>13</sup>A few days later the younger son gathered all he had and traveled to a distant country, and there he squandered his property in dissolute living. <sup>14</sup>When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that country, and he began to be in need. <sup>15</sup>So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs. <sup>16</sup>He would gladly have filled himself with the pods that the pigs were eating; and no one gave him anything. <sup>17</sup>But when he came to himself he said, 'How many of my father's hired hands have bread enough and to spare, but here I am dying of hunger! <sup>18</sup>I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; <sup>19</sup>I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands.'" <sup>20</sup>So 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. <sup>21</sup>Then the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' <sup>22</sup>But the father said to his slaves, 'Quickly, bring out a robe-the best one-and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. <sup>23</sup>And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; <sup>24</sup>for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!' And they began to celebrate.

25"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, 'Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has got him back safe and sound.' 28Then he became angry and refused to go in. His father came out and began to plead with him. 29But he answered his father, '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!' 31Then the father said to him, '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.'"

## **“When We Arrive”**

### **The Prodigal – Part One**

**He thought he knew exactly what he wanted. There were some absolutes. There were some things he knew for sure.**

**He did not want to stay there on the family farm—he did not want to end up with that life. He did not want to delay the kind of life he wanted to live—he did not want to have to wait for the old man to die in order to inherit the means to the kind of life he wanted to live.**

**So he asked for it—his share—all of it. And he got it. And it was good—it was real good until it ran out.**

**Not planned for sure—this had become nothing like what he had envisioned for himself as he was garnering the courage to ask his father for his portion of family holdings. And then, right there in the unplannedness of having spent through everything he ends up with the best job he can get. Feeding pigs—how repulsive.**

**How amazing that he realized, how does the writer put it—“when he came to himself.” When we arrive—when we “come to ourselves”—we realize. We realize the you, the me, the person we are is not the person we should be.**

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## **St. Patrick – Part One**

**It is all green. Green clothes, green cakes, even green beverages—it is all green—all day on St. Patrick’s Day. It is a really remarkable old story about a fascinating character in history.**

**The St. Patrick chalice tells the story in four panels of pewter.**

**In the first panel the young Patrick of about 16 years old is captured along with his father and his father’s sea faring vessels—they are hauled off to the pagan land of what is now called Ireland.**

**In the second panel we find out what becomes of the enslaved Patrick. He is sent out to tend and herd sheep. He is wonderful at it, but he prays for release. Eventually, after many years of hard labor Patrick makes his escape.**

**In the third panel we learn of his fait—he becomes a priest. He becomes a Christian missionary. And off he sets sail.**

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## **Jesus – Part One**

**The problem is Jesus. The Pharisees and officers of the church are watching. This Jesus is spending his attention on the tax collectors and the sinners. How dare he associate with those sorts of people? He is drawing a whole lot of attention and that attention should be on them.**

**Part of the problem is those tax collectors and sinners are responding. Jesus is welcomed by and welcoming of those outcasts. The official rank and file of the religious sorts does not see much good in hanging out with the tax collectors and the sinners. They just are not the sort you want to be found around you know.**

**But Jesus tells this story—this story about the prodigal son. It is a story that speaks to the reality that he, the Incarnate One, and his Father, the God of all Creation, will welcome all. All are welcome here. It is message not only for the tax collectors and sinners, but it is also for the Pharisees and religious folks—all are welcome.**

**Jesus had to have a pretty clear idea of who he was—he had to have a firm grasp on his understanding of himself. He had arrived at a pretty clear moment of self understanding to not only be seen with the likes of sinners and tax collectors but also to take on those who challenged him with that.**

**Jesus was self differentiated. Jesus lived a clear purpose.**

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## **Us – Part One**

**What is it all about anyway? This whole business of life—where is it going, what is next, and is there any point? Some days we struggle and consider how we fit into the large scheme of the world and the universe. Other days, and maybe even the same day, we even wonder how we fit into the day.**

**What is it all about? What is the point, the purpose?**

**You have heard enough of these sermons to know where I am headed. It is not about the money. The money does not make you. It is not about how good you look to the neighbors. That does not mean anything.**

**It is not about the stuff the magazines tell you it is about. It is not even about the stuff the media or the Ivy League institutions tell you it is about. No it is not about any of that.**

**It is not about power, or prestige, or security or any of it. When you arrive at yourself—when you take that long hard look at your life and look deeply into yourself look beyond the grey hairs you see reflected there. It is not even about how much of life has gone by or how little is left.**

**It is about—oh this life is about this moment—it is about taking hold of the purpose for which God has placed you here. It is about this moment when you arrive at yourself. It is about this moment when we so take a hold of life that we make this moment, this day, this week, this season count.**

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### **The Prodigal – Part Two**

**Even Dad’s hired hands at home ate better than he was eating. He remembered that and he knew how lost he was.**

**He came to himself—he arrived at himself. He saw himself – maybe for the first time. He came to himself and realized that he would live better as a slave at home. So he headed home to beg his Dad to let him live as a slave.**

**But Dad saw him coming. See here, his Dad saw him coming because he was probably keeping vigil and keeping watch. He was praying for this day. Dad sees him coming and runs out to him. He welcomes him. He accepts him.**

**It is the same generous love that was able to let him go that also welcomes him home. The lost son never even has the chance to make the speech he had rehearsed that would beg his father to allow him back. Instead the Dad in the story is embracing him, dressing him up, and gathering a party to celebrate his return. In generous love he is welcomed home.**

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## **St. Patrick – Part Two**

**Yes we learn his story – it is the powerfully amazing part – in that fourth panel of the St. Patrick chalice we discover where he goes. He goes to the very place where he was a slave. And there he shares the Good News and imparts the faith. The legend is that he used the clover—ah, the shamrock, to teach about the trinity.**

**The saintly legend is that he preaches from the green hills and all the wild snakes that had so viciously attacked people – they are miraculously driven from the hills. As the story goes, to this day there are no wild snakes ever seen in Ireland. This is one of the events that earns Patrick the title of “saint.”**

**The incredible moment—the powerful one—is that moment when he is the very one. He is the one who is to go back to that place where he had been a slave. He arrived at himself. He arrived at himself—came to himself, if you will—and realizes that it is the moment and he is the one that God has called.**

**He comes to that realization. And he goes. He goes to the very place where he had been enslaved. He goes.**

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## **Jesus – Part Two**

**This was not a onetime stand between Jesus, outcasts, and Pharisees. This issue of who is in and who is not—it was not accident. It was not just about this story or this scene. This was the whole of it.**

**This was the sum and total of his life. This was what he lived for. This was the point of the cross. It was the cross.**

**This Jesus who gave it all away, even his whole life—giving it up and giving it over—was for that very moment. That moment of welcoming those tax collectors and sinners was the same moment he was calling for the Pharisees to see that they were to come along and step into the same reality.**

**It is this moment that finds its center in the cross where the proclamation is so clear that God is fully and completely saying “yes” to us. God is saying “yes” to the reality that we belong and nothing will be able to separate us from that love of God. We are welcome.**

**This is my body broken for you. This is my blood shed for you. For you. For us. The God of all history steps into this moment and even as he did with those tax collectors and Pharisees of long ago, this God says to us, “You are included. You are welcome here. You. You.”**

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## **Us – Part Two**

**When we arrive. When we arrive at ourselves we realize that we are the prodigal son always trying to go it on our own and it never works. We are the prodigal son needing to get it and pick up and go home. It is true—God welcomes us no matter how bad it was.**

**When we arrive at ourselves—we realize that we are St. Patrick—facing our fears and allowing God to transform that which once enslaved us to be our legacy. God can use us for a purpose so much larger than we can imagine—if we will but welcome that and step up into it.**

**When we arrive at ourselves and realize that the body of Christ covers us. When we realize that he is poured out on us and we are part of him; we are in Christ. When we come to that reality that other than our**

**relationship with Christ there really is nothing else that is really real—oh, then we have arrived. We are have come home.**

**The real arrival—the real point in which we have arrived is when again and again and again we find that it is not about us. It is not about us and it is always about the welcoming God reaching all the way out and all the way down to us and claiming us as God’s own.**

**When our life is filled up with that reality... When our cup runneth over with that truth – that God is our only – our only anything and our only everything. When we arrive there—then we are home. Amen.**