

HOLY TRINITY ANGLICAN CHURCH METCALFE, ON.

MARCH 27, 2022

LENT 4

Reverend Michael Fleming

Fr. Michael: As we continue our Lenten journey home, we acknowledge that our sacred space and the place where we live lie on the unceded territory of the Anishinaabe Algonquin people.

People: **May we walk together in harmony and in a spirit of reconciliation.**

Fr. Michael: The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

People: **And also with you.**

Fr. Michael: In Jesus there is a new creation.

People: **Everything old has passed away; everything has become new.**

Fr. Michael: Rejoice and be glad!

People: **Everything has become new!**

Fr. Michael: God of steadfast love and mercy, remind us once again that in Jesus Christ everything has become new. For far too often, things seem as they have always been; old habits die hard, difficult situations linger, failures from our past linger. We look for your promised newness but cannot see it. Speak to us again of your new creation; open our eyes to its presence in our lives. Call us forth to claim this newness so that we might be healed and made new. Amen

Fr. Michael: As family gathered in the newness of Christ, we pray Almighty God,

People: **to you all hearts are open, all desires known, and from you no secrets are hidden.**

Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love you, and worthily magnify your holy name, through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Fr. Michael: In this Lenten season we turn once again to you Lord and pray three times,

People: **Holy God, holy and mighty, holy immortal one, have mercy on us.**

Fr. Michael: Gracious God, whose blessed Son came 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 forever. Amen

Reader: A reading from the book of Joshua (Joshua 5: 9-12)

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. 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.

On the day after the Passover, on that very day, they ate the produce of the land, unleavened cakes and parched grain. 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.

The Word of the Lord

People: **Thanks be to God**

Reader: Creator God, you prepare a new place in the wilderness and water the desert. Help us to recognize your hand working miracles beyond our imagination. Open our hearts to be transformed by the new thing that you are doing, so that our lives may proclaim the extravagance of your love for all and its presence in our Lord, Jesus. Amen

(from re:Worship 2022)

Reader: Today, we share Psalm 32...

How blessed we are! Our sins are forgiven; our guilt is wholly removed!

People: **God does not condemn us, but saves us from corruption and removes all guile from my spirit.**

Reader: When we refused to see our sins and kept guilty silence, we ached and groaned all day like aged women. Day and night we felt your hand like a heavy weight on our hearts. Our souls dried up and withered like plants in a drought.

People: **Then we confessed our sin to you. We no longer try to hide our sin from you. And when we confess our transgressions, you forgive us completely.**

Reader: When the godly see the dark side of themselves. Let them go to You in prayerful confession. Then they will not be overwhelmed by floods of guilt. They will realize with us that you are our hiding place.

People: **In times of trouble you protect our souls, surrounding us with songs of deliverance! You instruct us and teach us the way we should go. You watch over us and give us wise counsel. You ask us not to be like horses and mules, without understanding who wander away if they are not held with bit and bridle.**

Reader: The wicked who wander away from God suffer many sorrows, but those who trust in the Lord are embraced by mercy. Therefore, rejoice and be glad in El Shaddai and shout for joy, all you who live with integrity! (from Swallow's Nest by Marcienne Vroon Riuensra 1992)

Reader: O God, teach us the way we should go; counsel us in the ways of life. We wait upon your teaching and counsel for we are lost without them. Amen
(from MinistryMatters: Worship Elements 2022)

Reader: A reading from Paul's second letter to the people of Corinth (2 Corinthians 5: 16-21)

From now on, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, we know him no longer in that way. So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

The Word of the Lord

People: **Thanks be to God**

Reader: Have you looked for crocus shoots or buds on trees?

People: **Look around and see the newness!**

Reader: Did you see or hear this week about love in action?

People: **Look around and see the newness!**

Reader: Did someone who was lost find their way home?

People: **Look around and see the newness!**

Reader: In Jesus Christ, God is busy making all things new.

People: **Be glad in the Lord and rejoice!** (from MinistryMatters: Worship Elements 2022)

Holy Gospel

Fr. Michael: The Lord be with you.

People: **And also with you.**

Fr. Michael: The Holy Gospel of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ according to the blessed St. Luke (15: 1-3, 11-32)

People: **Glory to you, Lord Jesus Christ.**

Now all the tax collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to Jesus. And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, "This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them." So he told them this parable: "There was a man who had two sons. 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. A 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. When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that country, and he began to be in need. 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.

He would gladly have filled himself with the pods that the pigs were eating; and no one gave him anything. 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! I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands."' 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. 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.' 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. And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!' And they began to celebrate. Now his elder son was in the field; and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. He called one of the slaves and asked what was going on. He replied, 'Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has got him back safe and sound.' Then he became angry and refused to go in. His father came out and began to plead with him. But 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. But when this son of yours came back, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fatted calf for him!' Then the father said to him, 'Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. But 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.'"

Fr. Michael: The Gospel of Christ.

People: **Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ**

LOST AND FOUND

I wanted to go to St. Petersburg for one reason – to go to the Hermitage and stand before the painting. I had seen enough copies of it and now I had the chance to be in the presence of the original. At the very end of our time in the huge palace of the Tsars, I found it and just stood there and stared, lost in the power of the painting and the prose of Henri Nouwen who had written the book which had put me on my quest - there was Rembrandt's Return of the Prodigal not more than three feet away and all I could do was stand there and stare. As I left the gallery, I turned and quietly said to the painting, "Thank you."

The narrative Rembrandt so powerfully captured is one of the most "famous" of the stories that Jesus tells. It is one which you can probably recite from memory but is also a story that swirls around us, blowing some subtle and not-so-subtle notions and ideas at us, often with lightning speed. It is a story of life, death and resurrection, of grace, forgiveness and reconciliation, of invitations and the need to RSVP.

Just hold it a sec – death? There's no death in this story! While it is true that no one tumbles over a cliff, takes a bullet or whatever, death walks in right at the beginning of the parable – the death of relationships. Dishonourable number two son demands a share of the inheritance he will get when the old man is gone, thus consciously or unconsciously saying to his father, "I wish you were dead."

The father does what his child wants, and in a way commits suicide – the old old man dies to both his children: number two moves out and disappears; number one boy is given the farm and dad becomes a servant to the son. In the process, the two brothers' relationship dies as well and the separation of the living dead comes when the younger looks at the older and says, "I'm outta here!"...

Months later, after living on the wild side and falling down all sorts of rabbit holes, the young man wakes one day and realizes how dead he is and how much he wants to live – he is as dead as the pigs that he feeds on their way to the slaughterhouse and there is nothing left but the bottom – he wants to start again and thus is resurrection birthed.

As the story unfolds, the father does what he has done every day since his son left – he stands at the fence by the highway – just stands and watches the road...just in case. Each day, he does what his eldest son tells him to do and thinks, "Maybe tomorrow" but each tomorrow wears down his spirit and his soul – his boy is lost forever. But, the father says to himself, "I may be dead to him, but he will always be my boy and I'm gonna go to the road every day and hope..cuz that's all I got left."

One morning, the old man leans against the weary wood and stares like always: first left, then right – nothing coming, nothing going. The highway is as empty as his life, he thinks. Then, he spots something – a blur near the horizon which seems to be coming towards him – at first it looks like one of those shadowy things which is made by hot sun dancing on asphalt but it begins more and more to take shape. Seeing what he sees, the old man bolts through the gate, grabs the ends of his tunic and tucks them in his belt and takes off down the highway, going lickety-split because he does not want to lose the dream – this boy..his boy is coming home. And before the young man can beg for his father's forgiveness, he finds himself caught up in the most genormous bear-hug ever and swirls and swirls and swirls in a dance of joy, a dance of homecoming and nothing is said – nothing needs be said, for in the dance is the music, is the word. In the eyes and the heart of the father, what was dead is alive, what was lost has been found and now...now it was time to party til the cows came home! But. in order for the party to begin, one more death must happen – the fatted calf lays down his life so the feast of resurrection might begin.

The second theme of the story and the painting is that of confession, forgiveness, reconciliation and grace. I must confess to being somewhat sceptical about the sincerity of the lad's confession! Was it really heartfelt or did he know his dad so well that he knew what would pull on the old heartstrings? Knowing that the past is the past and can never be regained, he begs his father to let him return home as the lowest of the servants, knowing all too well that his father would never allow that to happen! This was the plan until...until his father embraces him and in the hug of reconciliation, the servant scheme is abandoned - slave is son. Somewhere on the road, the prodigal realizes how dead he is and that what will happen will not be because his desires but because of the will of his dad. And so he confesses all, particularly the lost sonship and waits for the decision. But the father knows that he could never do what his son had done – abandon love in favour of the chattel of the world. He doesn't pull the old "I told you so" nor make his son pay for his foolishness- he simply dances in the joy of the moment of reconciliation and hope for the future. Here is an act of pure grace – no retributions, no conditions for re-entry into his father's heart – just forgiveness on a grand scale. The son did not earn or even deserve such treatment but receive it he did nonetheless. The father willingly paid the price - his own diminishment so his sons might rise and this had been his game plan from the moment his younger son disowned him – to fully forgive when the lonely journey of self-discovery was over. The father's response was simple, "Let's party".

Let's party – what a simple invitation to the kingdom! Arm in arm, shoulder to shoulder, barely containing their mutual joy of rebirth, they enter the house which once belonged to the old man and order the band to begin to blow! And blow they did – no noise restrictions here! But, as the celebration begins, shadows cross the threshold – someone is messing up the shindig...Gloomy Gus has arrived in the person of the elder son. In most stories, he would be the one held up for praise as an example of loyalty and doing one's duty – he has remained at home, looking after business – he's been a good boy and all that! But, in this tale, he emerges as the biggest loser of all. The father

leaves the party and goes outside where Mr Doom and Gloom is standing, shaking with anger. Invited to come inside and celebrate, he yells, “No way. Jose. What you’re doing is not only unbelievable..it’s crazy. You throw this huge thing for the family mess – up while I...I...I who gave up everything to look after our property....I get nothing, zero, zilch! Where’s the justice in this? – no, I will not take part in this charade.”

The father replies, “My son, I have always loved you and I always will. I’m not comparing the two of you – I’m rejoicing that the one who got lost has been found, the one once dead is alive. Is that not enough reason to dance?” As a response, the older son throws up his hands, turns on his heel and storms off. In Rembrandt’s painting, there he is – ramrod straight with a scowl on his face, hands clenched at his waist – he is a solid wall which no one would ever be able to break through – he is Paul’s Simon’s “rock and island that no one can penetrate” and he is alone...

As I look at Rembrandt’s painting, I think of what William Barclay said about the parables – that they are cute little stories that sneak up on you and give you a good swift kick in the ...conscience. I think of relationships lost, relationships found, of opportunities missed because they would not go the way I planned them, of the many deaths and resurrections I have experienced in my life. I wonder about my capacity to forgive without conditions, to accept acts of grace without questioning motivations and to live creatively and with joy. But chiefly, I think about who I am in this story: am I the forgiving father, the righteous son, the indifferent neighbour or the lad who went away? Perhaps on this Lenten journey, I will discover that!

Who might you be?

Fr. Michael: Faith means betting your life that something is true. For two thousand years the Church has laid her life on the line as she says, I believe in God the Father Almighty,

People: creator of heaven and earth. I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord. He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary. He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended to the dead. On the third day he rose again. He ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen

Reader: Heavenly Father, when our wilderness journey ends and normalcy returns to our lives, remind us to look back and see where you carried us through, deepened our faith and provided us with your loving care.

People: In the hours of our darkness, be present to us Lord.

Reader: Holy Spirit, when suffering is the result of our own sin, inspire us to turn around, ask for help, accept your forgiveness and live anew in your grace. Guide and direct your Church to continue to be a beacon of light in the darkness and hope for the lost. Today, in our diocesan cycle, we pray for Area Parish of the Valley -The Right Reverend Michael Bird, The Reverend Matthew Brown, The Reverend Canon Susan Clifford, The Reverend Gillian Hoyer and for all in our diocese living under religious vows. Be present with all care-givers and hope-finders.

People: In the hours of our darkness, be present to us Lord.

Reader: Almighty God, Hope beyond hope, Love beyond understanding, Forgiver and Forgetter, wait for us in patience, but remind us that you call us home in love and to Love. We pray for our parish family today, and we begin in the silence of our souls where those who have asked for our private prayer listen; we hold those of our community who have asked us to pray for them Irene, Howard, Marjorie, Sarah, Scott, Zachariah, Jeanette, and Cheryl.

People: In the hours of our darkness, be present to us Lord.

Reader: Lord Jesus, as you told parables in order to make the gospel clear, put us in a story of your choosing and bring us to a deeper faith in you. Help us to find our place in your stories Lord and help us to share your gospel good news with others.

People: **In the hours of our darkness, be present to us Lord.**

Reader: We pray for those who need to be assured that there is healing in your Power, light in your Love and hope in your Word and that we are your ambassadors of that good news.

People: **In the heart of our darkness, let your Light and Love shine. Amen.**

Fr. Michael: Let us turn to our God and one another and hold ourselves before the One who knows all, sees all and loves all. Gracious and loving God,

People: **open our hearts so that we may be able to admit to you the fullness of our lives – that which is beautiful and good and that which is hurtful and hateful. We confess that we do not follow Jesus in all that we do, we love with conditions, we judge and condemn; we cast the first stone and keep our logs in our own eyes. We do not turn to you as the source of our own healing. Forgive us, we pray; forgive us our sins and empower us to be imitators of Christ in love and service. Help us to find our way home, Lord.**

Fr. Michael: Sisters and brothers, know this: the mercy of God is from everlasting and I remind you of this surpassing and amazing grace – that you are loved by the Father, embraced by the Son and upheld by the Spirit. God loves beyond measure and imagination: you are a part of that overwhelming gift. Rejoice and be glad. Amen! And may the peace, the Shalom of the Lord be with you always.

People: **And also with you.**

WE SHARE THE PEACE WITH ONE ANOTHER

Fr. Michael: Bless these gifts, Generous God so that they may be used to find your children – those who wander in hunger, those who long to come home. Through our gifts, may all who wander set off for home and may we celebrate and rejoice in their homecoming. Amen

(from MinistryMatters: Worship Elements 2022)

Fr. Michael: The Lord be with you.

People: **And also with you.**

Fr. Michael: Lift up your hearts.

People: **We lift them to the Lord.**

Fr. Michael: Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

People: **It is right to give our thanks and praise.**

Fr. Michael: O Lord our God Sustainer of the universe. You are worthy of glory and praise. At your command all things came to be: the vast expanse of interstellar space, galaxies, suns, the planets in their courses of this fragile earth, our island home.

People: **Glory to you for ever and ever.**

Fr. Michael: From the primal elements you brought forth the human race and blessed us with memory, reason and skill; you made us the stewards of creation.

People: **Glory to you forever and ever.**

Fr. Michael: But we turn against you and betray your trust; and we turn against one another. Again and again, you call us to return. Through the prophets and sages, you reveal your righteous law. In the fullness of time, you sent your Son, born of a woman, to be our Saviour. He was wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities. By his death, he opened to us the way of freedom and peace.

People: **Glory to you for ever and ever.**

Fr. Michael: Therefore we praise you. Joining with the heavenly chorus, with prophets, apostles, martyrs and with those in every generation who have looked to you in hope to proclaim with them your glory in their unending hymn:

People: **Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might; heaven and earth are full of your glory; hosanna in the highest. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest.**

Fr. Michael: Blessed are you, Lord our God, for sending us Jesus the Christ, who on the night he was handed over to suffering and death, took bread, said the blessing, broke the bread, gave it to his friends and said, "Take this and eat it: this is my body which is given for you. Do this for the remembrance of me." In the same way after supper, he took the cup, he gave you thanks and said, "Drink this, all of you. This is my blood of the new covenant which is shed for you and for many for the forgiveness of sin. Whenever you drink it, do this for the remembrance of me."

People: **Glory to you for ever and ever.**

Fr. Michael: Gracious God, we recall the death of your Son Jesus, we proclaim his resurrection and we look with expectation for his coming again as Lord of all the nations. We who have been redeemed by him and made a new people through water and the Spirit now bring you these gifts. Send your Holy Spirit upon us and upon this offering of your holy Church, that we who eat and drink at this holy table may share the divine life in Jesus Christ the Lord.

People: **Glory to you for ever and ever.**

Fr. Michael: Pour out your Spirit on the whole earth and make it your new creation. Gather your Church together from the end of the earth into your kingdom, where peace and justice are revealed, that we, with all your people, of every language, race and nation may share the banquet which you have prepared: through Christ and with Christ and in Christ, all honour and glory are yours, Creator of all.

People: **Glory to you for ever and ever.**

Fr. Michael: And now, as our Lord has gifted to his Church, together we pray,

People: **Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.**

Fr. Michael: We break this bread.

People: **Communion in Christ's Body once broken.**

Fr. Michael: Let your Church be the wheat which bears its fruit in dying.

People: **If we have died with him, we shall live with him. If we hold firm, we shall reign with him.**

Fr. Michael: The gifts of God for the children of God.

People: **Thanks be to God.**

We Share The Gifts Of God With Our Sisters and Brothers

Fr. Michael: O God, by your Spirit unite us with Christ and with your Church in all the world. Make us a new creation, reconcile us to yourself, so that we may bear your message of reconciliation to all the world. Let us be ambassadors for Christ and ministers of his grace and service. Amen

People: **Holy and Gracious God, You, the one of prodigal grace, we give you thanks for the gift of life and for all the blessings of this life; for family and friends and for the gift of love abundant. Lead us through the trials, the suffering, the sorrows and the challenges and struggles, the tired time, the desperate and bleak places; lead us back to you and to love abundant. Be with all who weep and mourn or who cannot sleep; those who have no peace, who seek release and comfort them with your love abundant. Fill us with hope, sustained by your mercy, with patience and stamina, upheld by your Holy Spirit in your prodigal grace. Transform us and all our broken ways; transform us so that we can be made whole; and in wholeness may we be the hands and hearts of Christ. Amen**

Fr. Michael: Lord God our Father, Creator: we thank you for the gift of this parish of Holy Trinity and for all those who minister from the sacred space. Inspire us with your vision to set our roots deeply and firmly in the faith, that we may be stewards of justice in all your creation. Lord God Jesus, Saviour and Redeemer: we thank you for your continuing presence in our parish family. Inspire us to seek you in Scripture, the Sacraments and one another, that we may be faithful to your call to evangelism and service. Lord God, Holy Spirit, Sustainer and Renewer: we thank you for all the wondrous gifts you have poured upon us. Inspire us to serve you in body and in spirit; help us to share our gifts of time, creativity, talents and other resources; open us to your renewing life-giving power. O God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – we praise you, we love you, we seek you and we serve you in the name of Jesus our Redeemer, Friend and Brother. Amen (RMF)

God of the lost, the lonely and all who long for home; when we wander from your ways and waste the gifts you have given us, welcome us home so that we may rejoice and celebrate in your presence forever. And that peace of God – Father, Son and Spirit – which passes all understanding, be with you and yours and those whom you love and those who love you this day, this week and forevermore. Amen

Worship follows the Holy Eucharist in the Book of Alternative Services.

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