

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

Below are the readings and sermon for Sunday July 19, 2020. I hope they have reached you in good health and the Spirit of our Lord.

In Christ's Peace,

Pastor Steve

Readings

Luke 15:25-32

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." '

2 Corinthians 5:11-21

The Ministry of Reconciliation

11 Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we try to persuade others; but we ourselves are well known to God, and I hope that we are also well known to your consciences. ¹²We are not commending ourselves to you again, but giving you an opportunity to boast about us, so that you may be able to answer those who boast in outward appearance and not in the heart. ¹³For if we are beside ourselves, it is for God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you.

¹⁴For the love of Christ urges us on, because we are convinced that one has died for all; therefore all have died. ¹⁵And he died for all, so that those who live might live no longer for themselves, but for him who died and was raised for them.

16 From now on, therefore, 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. ¹⁷So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! ¹⁸All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; ¹⁹that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. ²⁰So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. ²¹For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Sermon

Do you remember “do-overs” when you were a kid? Such as when a passing car interrupted your side-street kickball game. The huge boot you gave the ball is called back mid-play because your neighbor has turned the corner right into your kickball game, nullifying your grand kick. The unwritten law of street kickball takes over and the agreement is... “Do-over”! And it is so. *Let’s try this again.* Or how about those times you were playing chess or checkers. You have been studying the board for your next move. You are confident in moving your piece from point A to point B. The rules being that as soon as you release your grip from the playing piece and commit it to a square, your turn is over. No sooner you let go of the piece and you see the danger you have placed the piece in. It’s a goner. It will be snapped up by your opponent immediately. Your ensuing exclamation says it all, “D’oh!”, and your opponent says, “Take it back. You can do it over.”

In the greater scope of life’s occurrences and scenarios, “do overs” carry a lot more weight than the examples I just mentioned. For a moment, think of a mistake, or injustice that has rendered you ineffective or corruptive to yourself and/or others...Likewise, think of a mistake, or injustice you have had a hand in instigating, or perpetuating unto yourself or others...In either case, have you moved on in the light, love and promise God provides in Jesus? If yes, great! This message will serve as a spiritual refresher and affirmation of the identity you reside in. For those who struggle with locating and accepting the new identity in Jesus Christ Paul speaks of, then this message is for you. For those who struggle with connecting God, Jesus, You, and others together so that you can live free of guilt and able to reckon with doubts through faith then this

message is for you. If you are human, chances are you wrestle with the giving and receiving of “do overs”. If they evade you, then this message is especially for you. If living in regret of, in shame of, or in fear of, leaves you suspended in the past, and in confrontational fear of the present, and future, then listen closely to how deep, far, and wide God’s reconciling reach goes.

Jesus is our God-given reconciliation, so that all that vexes and prevents us from having a loving existence is resolved. Jesus is our God-given reconciliation, so that we may be reunited to God and one another. Across all divisions. Jesus is our God-given reconciliation so that there is no score to be settled, so that there is no merit-based acceptance into God’s good graces. Jesus is our God-given image, presence and promise of love whose life, death and resurrection bids us to live transformed in the identity ascribed to you. Consoled, forgiven and reconciled...just because. Now do so for one another. The expense has been paid. The sacrifice made. In the name and love of Jesus Christ, we are summoned to participate, in helping the world “do” life over, as He taught and as the Holy Spirit encourages.

If it weren’t for do-overs and the space given to try again, we would all be in a world of hurt. Thanks be to God for those who risk or give up, their pride, wealth and positions of influence so that healing can be realized. Thanks be to God for those persons who know the grace of God because they have been repaired by God’s love. Thanks be to God for those persons who by the grace of God lead the broken to Jesus Christ and witness to the truth that He is the source of their healing. He is the source of their forgiveness. He is the source of their life. They know that each and every day God’s grace restores their

intended identity. This propels them forward. This is their faith fuel. And as Paul states, this also, is how God appeals to us, through Christ's identity in them. So that we may see it. So that we may hope for it. Thanks be to God for providing Christ, the conduit of our reconciliation to God and to one another.

Living in the identity of Jesus Christ is knowing that whatever has, and will seek to separate us from one another, and thus from God, will not define us. Instead, it should inform us of how to "do over" and live better by God and one another loving. Having been reconciled by God, it is upon us to be resolved in difference and reunited in and for God's purpose, not ours. Granting a "do over" to each other when lost is offering a different attitude or response than expected. Granting a "do over" to each other when lost says that what-ever you did, whatever mistake/faux pas/wrong/lapse of judgement is in the past. And if God can handle it, perhaps I should try too.

In our Gospel this morning...an excerpt from the Prodigal Son. You know it well. The short of it is...The younger of two sons asks their father for his inheritance while the father is still alive. The father gives him his portion of the inheritance. The son goes off to distant land and squanders his money on a life with a diminishing return of investment. He is failing at life. He has lost everything. Living amongst pigs with nothing to eat and no help, he decides to return home. Upon arriving home, his father did not question his whereabouts. He did not ask for an account of how the early inheritance pay out was spent. The father did not ask for a confession of his sins while away. The father did not question how long he intended to stay, or what his intentions are now back at home. The father did not chastise him for worrying him so. Not a single berating word or ounce of guilt was placed upon the wayward Son. No

restitution or reparations needed. The son came back empty handed. Nothing. This does not make sense to the older son. *No punishment?! Bad behavior rewarded?!* The father knows his son. There is no need to pile on the disappointment and shame. What the returned son did to his father is punishment enough. The unconditional acceptance and joy of his return despite his actions will shame the son. The loving action of his father despite his actions, will be eternally bound to his conscience. This is a time for joy and celebration. The lost son is to do this chapter of his life over. The father's gracious reception of the son has him facing the future with hope.

How resolute in Christ's identity could we be if we absorbed the kind of grace the father showered on the lost son and in turn lived it out and into the world? Imagine...You are consoled, forgiven and reconciled...good with God, we shed the sins of our past and present and walk boldly towards the future. Perhaps that is what brought the son home? He knew his father's character. And you know our Heavenly Father's character. Love first and foremost. You are a new creation in Christ good people. Own the forgiveness. Own the love. How has the Father's love and can do/do over identity instilled in you, reveal God's character to the broken and lost?

"Do overs" are due. Individually, may God prepare us to forgive and be forgiven. Individually, may God prepare us to live so that we make seek reconciliation among and between us and "do what was wrong and unjust over".

Wanting to start at go as a hopeful new creation in Christ, now is as good a time as any to initiate "do overs" for ourselves and one another. Everyone has that someone(s) in their life that would benefit from our extending them an

unexpected olive branch of reconciliation. Who is your person? Think of how that would rest on their heart. Think of how that could feed their soul. Imagine how powerful it could be. Imagine the hearts that could be tilted towards loving more? Imagine the strife that could be silenced. Imagine the political divides that could be narrowed. Imagine how much more life there could be here on earth if we granted one another a simple “do over”.

Imagine what that would look like. Perhaps more listening, empathizing and listening past what we want to hear and what God desires us to know.

Imagine... No, don't imagine these things. Hope in these things. Because hope does not disappoint us because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit...so that we may love and provide for one another and ourselves over and over again. Look ahead, live life forward. For that is where God leads us. Faithfully into the future. Take someone with you, or point them in God's direction. Amen.