

Readings for March 19, 2023

United Church of Strafford In Person and Zoom Service

Responsive Reading *from Psalm 32*

Leader: Blessed are those whose transgression is forgiven,
whose sin is covered.

**People: While I kept silence, my body wasted away
through my groaning all day long.**

Leader: Then I acknowledged my sin to you,
and I did not hide my iniquity;
I said, "I will confess my transgressions to God,"
and you forgave the guilt of my sin.

**People: Therefore let all who are faithful offer prayer to you;
at a time of distress,
the rush of mighty waters shall not reach them.**

Leader: You are a hiding place for me;
you preserve me from trouble;
you surround me with glad cries of deliverance.

**People: I will instruct you
and teach you the way you should go;
I will counsel you with my eye upon you.**

Leader: Do not be like a horse or a mule, without understanding,
whose temper must be curbed with bit and bridle,
else it will not stay near you.

**People: Many are the torments of the wicked,
but steadfast love surrounds those who trust in God.
Be glad in God, all you upright in heart.**

2 Corinthians 5:16-20

From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a limited, unspiritual human point of view; even though we once knew Christ from that point of view, we know him no longer in that way, because 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 the Spirit through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to the Spirit, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making the appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to the Spirit.

Luke 15:1-3, 11b-32

Now all the tax collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to him. 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 traveled 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.’”