

Psalm 107 vs 1: Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good!

His faithful love endures forever.

Luke 15:31-32

³¹ “His father said to him, ‘Look, dear son, you have always stayed by me, and everything I have is yours. ³² We had to celebrate this happy day. For your brother was dead and has come back to life! He was lost, but now he is found!’”

Our story begins, “A man had two sons.”
Knowing our scriptures as we do,
we enter into this story with the assumption
that it will not have a happy ending.
We remember the trouble between Cain and Able,
Ishmael and Isaac and Jacob and Esau,
to name a few biblical families
with dysfunctional relationships between male siblings.

And our assumption plays out well
as things seem to be backwards in this parable:
the father appears to indulge the son who slighted him
and appears to slight the son who indulged him.
The lavish celebration for the son who slighted him
only exasperates the division between the sons.

So why the party?

Upon seeing his son who was lost and now found,
the father’s heart burst open with love and gratitude
and his only faithful response was to lavishly welcome him home.

His heart was made whole, his family restored,
and he wanted to celebrate the resurrection
which was before his very eyes.
He needed to offer in thanksgiving all that he had,
the best robe and ring the household owned,
and an extravagant party,
an outward sign,
for only all of this could mirror the inner grace
which had been offered to the family with his younger son's return.
The father met the son where he was and rejoiced at his return.
The party was to them
as the Eucharist is to us:
Jesus meets us where we are and rejoices at our return.

As with the younger son,
whether we return home in shame, or regret, or in complete brokenness,
Jesus meets us and rejoices.
It is the act of our returning home that is celebrated
and it is the grace offered by Jesus in the Eucharist
that heals our heart and allows us to become whole,
to be resurrected, to find a way toward new life
out of what had appeared dead in our lives.

Some of us, or sometimes in our lives,
we find ourselves refusing to come to the party, like the older son.
He seems to be allowing his own resentment and anger
to be a barrier to receiving his father's grace.
That can happen to us as well,
when we may believe it is our place to disinvite others
to the great banquet feast,
however, we know from our story and from the graciousness of God,
that **always all of us** are invited to the abundant feast,
held in honor of each one of us,

celebrating the turning of our hearts toward our home,
our heavenly Father.

Now the catch is, that when we receive this celebration of new life
in the feast of the Eucharist,
we must expect changes in our lives.
We don't have to change to receive this grace,
for God will meet us where we are,
but we can expect the grace received to change us.
Like the older brother, *we pray*,
we must expect that the resentment held in our hearts
for so many years
will melt away,
and we must plan for forgiveness to well up in our hearts
in unexpected places.
Like the younger brother,
we must anticipate our feelings of inferiority and shame to dissipate.
Like the father, we must look forward to our heart
being turned toward the greater good of the family
and our priority placed on reconciliation.
Like each one of them, who experienced death of some kind,
we must anticipate new life
which will be formed out of the dead places of our heart.
For this is what is offered us in the feast of the Eucharist.
We come expecting to be accepted and to be changed,
transformed by lavish grace,
so that we leave the table, forgiven, healed, and restored.

The feast, like our Eucharist, allowed the father,
like our heavenly father, to demonstrate joy at his son
who was dead and was alive again,
as we so often find ourselves.
The feast, *we pray*, erased the shame and regret the younger son felt,

so that he could rejoin the family forgiven and restored.
I believe that's God prayer for us as well.
And the feast opened the older son's eyes to the brokenness
in his own heart, which has been deadened by resentment and anger,
and *we pray*, invited him, and us too into wholeness too.
The party celebration was necessary to bring the family into wholeness.

God has set an abundant feast before us, desiring to bring God's human
family into wholeness, inviting us into resurrection, into new life. May we
all find ourselves at God's table.

Psalm 107 vs 43:

Those who are wise will take all this to heart;
they will see in our history the faithful love of the Lord.