

# WHY SHOULD YOUR CHURCH COMMIT TO A LIVING LENT?

## Sunday 31<sup>st</sup> March Fourth Sunday in Lent.

Joshua 5:9-12

Psalms 32

2 Corinthians 5:16-21

Luke 15:1-3, 11b-32

### Lectionary themes:

We've kept this week a bit lighter, as we're aware it's Mothering Sunday and the weekend following 29th March. There may be other political issues you may be inclined to preach on! If you're going to preach about Brexit then the 2 Corinthians reading about being ambassadors for Christ offers a helpful way of connecting faith and politics – we are called to diplomacy on behalf of a different kind of kingdom.

Now back to our eco thoughts on the gospel...

### Gospel reading: Luke 15:1-3; 11b-32

This reading edits out two parables: the lost sheep and the lost coin. This means that we are not hearing Jesus' first answer to the Pharisees, but his third. As the Living Lent preacher prepares, it would be worth reflecting on how the narration of those two parables get us to this story, the shepherd has made an unwise choice to leave sheep, that economical risk was considered to be God's understanding of good shepherding, if against our common sense. Secondly, the woman rejoiced when she had found her money and then spent it again on a party – a potentially profligate response, but again regarded as holy. Our parable, a long one, details the economic squander of a young man, and this is seemingly ill advised, and yet at the end of the story, he is the one being celebrated with a party, not the older brother. Seemingly God's economy of grace works somewhat differently to ours.

The son seems to sever his ties with his father, asking for his inheritance, not normally something that happens before someone dies, and thus the implication is that he is treating his father with disrespect; as though he were dead to him.

He then goes off on a massive spending spree on things of no substance. The word used for spending is also translatable as scatter, disperse, waste and squander. This is the idea that he is literally throwing his wealth away. As people who live in the West with relative wealth, this comes as a strong challenge: do we scatter our wealth on things of no substance? And do we buy so much in our consumer culture that we throw it away into landfill? Does this cycle of consumerism and gambling trap people in to poverty?

Then we are told after he had spent everything there was a severe famine. Here we see an ecological disaster that is not connected, but it is personally devastating because of how he had not been prepared. The pigs he ends up feeding are ritually unclean themselves and feeding them makes him someone who is enabling others to consume unclean food. This reflection on desiring the pods that they are fed might make for some interesting chuckles amongst those who have gone vegetarian for Lent – the slaughter of the fattened calf maybe less helpful there!

When he returns home to request servitude, his Father treats him with honour and respect, clothing him and giving him visible wealth in the form of jewels. Here the brother's reaction is widely understood to be symbolic of the relationship between the Jewish nation and the Gentile nation in their relationships to God the Father, but the humanness of the emotions and reactions are universal.

### **Application to living Lent:**

The challenge is of this passage is always about which brother we are: are we the one frittering away our earth's resources on things that have no value, trapped in a consumer cycle until it is too late when an ecological disaster hits?

Or, if we have lived appropriately, do we find ourselves resentful to those who squander the planet's resources being allowed to return to God with welcome and – God forbid – a methane emitting steak?!



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