**SOLIDARITY WITH SISTERS COMMUNAL PRAYER**

**March 27, 2022 - Fourth Sunday of Lent**

“Welcome home!”

**HELLOs,**then Betty mutes everyone.**( Betty Thompson and Suzie DeQuattro)**

**WELCOME                                               (Norb and Lynn Bufka)**

Welcome everyone!

* The Midland group had the pleasure of preparing today’s liturgy. We give special thanks to George Fulk for his original watercolor illustration which we will view throughout our readings today.
* Introductions – people who haven’t been here before?
* Thanks to Reggie Ott and Debra Street & Keith Miller for leading our music.
* Thanks to the people who will be reading and leading us in prayer today:  George Fulk, Deb Ballard, Lynn & Norb Bufka, Kathy & Bill Cavanaugh, Alicia Urban, and Kathy Linabery.
* If you’d like to read on future Sundays, please put a note in Chat or email later.

**SETTLING IN                                                        (Lynn Bufka)**

We invite you to settle into a comfortable position. Let our collective breath bring us into quiet so we can be attentive to each other and to the Spirit. Notice your breath as it goes in and out … let it slow and deepen … and slowly fill you with the Peace of Christ.

We begin with 3 deep breaths:

One to be here …

one to be together …

and one to make space for the Spirit.

Now Judy Sholes and Reggie Ott will lead us into our prayer together.

**OPENING RITUAL**                      **(Judy Sholes & Reggie Ott)**

Judy:  Beloved Community, Lent calls us to become Ambassadors of God.

All:  O God, we hear you calling.

Judy:  Beloved Community, we begin just where we are.

All:  O God, we hear you calling.

Judy:  Holy One, you appeal to us for justice, peace, and communion for your

Body!

All:  O God, we hear you calling.

Judy:  “Lent is a call to weep for what we could have been and are not. Lent is the grace to grieve for what we should have done and did not. Lent is the opportunity to change what we ought to change but have not. Lent is about becoming, doing and changing whatever it is that is blocking the fullness of life in us right now.”

How we remove these blockages can change both us and the world.  Let the words of Paul echo in us!:

We implore you in Christ’s name: know that you are a friend of God!. . .  This is the acceptable time!  This is the day of salvation!  We beg you not to receive this grace of God in vain.

Let us pause and reflect on what is hindering us making this the acceptable time, and this the day of salvation.   [*Pause about 2 slow deep breaths.]*

Judy:  Let us pray together:

All (muted):

I ask you, my sisters and brothers, to pray for me to our God.

Holy One, accept my deep sorrow for ways in which I participate in the

brokenness of your world — in my thoughts and in my words, in what I

have done and in what I have failed to do.

Thank you for your endless love for me, and for your forgiveness that

comes even before I ask.

Strengthen me to take an active part in bringing your grace to the world

in the company of all your children, all the saints, and all the earth. Amen.

Reggie (and all, muted):   Let’s state this intention in song together.

Sent by our God am I.

My hands are ready now

to make the earth a place

in which your Kin-dom comes.      (repeat)

The angels cannot change

A world of hurt and pain

Into a world of love,

Of justice and of peace.

The task is mine to do,

To set it really free,

So help me to obey,

Help me to do your will!

 Judy**:** George Fulk will introduce us to today’s theme.

**INTRODUCTION TO THEME                                                 (George Fulk)**

We are all familiar with the parable of the Prodigal son, who asks for his

inheritance, squanders it and returns home, seeking food - and forgiveness. We

learn of the father’s response and of the older brother’s resentment. This is a

story of strong characters, and each of us may have parts of all of them in us.

Jesus gives us this parable to describe our relationship to God in real-life terms.

Beyond our selfishness, our sense of duty, our hungers, our expectations for

fairness stands our God - full of love and always ready to welcome us home.

*(Slight pause)*

Richard McGinnis will read from Luke’s Gospel, Chapters 15, verses 1-3 and 11-32.  Betty Thompson will offer questions for your reflection, followed by silence.  Feel free to stay with whatever question calls you.

**READING 1****Luke 15:1-3, 11-32**                       **(Richard McGinnis)**

Tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to listen to Jesus, but the Pharisees and scribes began to complain, saying, “This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.” So to them Jesus addressed this parable:

“A man had two sons, and the younger son said to his father, ‘Father give me the share of your estate that should come to me.’ So the father divided the property between them. After a few days, the younger son collected all his belongings and set off to a distant country where he squandered his inheritance on a life of dissipation. When he had freely spent everything, a severe famine struck that country, and he found himself in dire need. So he hired himself out to one of the local citizens who sent him to his farm to tend the swine.

And he longed to eat his fill of the pods on which the swine fed, but nobody gave him any.

Coming to his senses he thought, ‘How many of my father’s hired workers  
have more than enough food to eat, but here am I, dying from hunger. I shall get up and go to my father and I shall say to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I no longer deserve to be called your son; treat me as you would treat one of your hired workers.”’

So he got up and went back to his father. While he was still a long way off,  
his father caught sight of him, and was filled with compassion. He ran to his son, embraced him and kissed him. His son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you; I no longer deserve to be called your son.’ But his father ordered his servants, ‘Quickly bring the finest robe and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Take the fattened calf and slaughter it. Then let us celebrate with a feast, because this son of mine was dead, and has come to life again; he was lost, and has been found.’ Then the celebration began.

Now the older son had been out in the field and, on his way back, as he neared the house, he heard the sound of music and dancing. He called one of the servants and asked what this might mean. The servant said to him, ‘Your brother has returned and your father has slaughtered the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.’

The older son became angry, and when he refused to enter the house, his father came out and pleaded with him. He said to his father in reply, ‘Look, all these years I served you and not once did I disobey your orders; yet you never gave me even a young goat to feast on with my friends. But when your son returns  
who swallowed up your property with prostitutes, for him you slaughter the fattened calf.’

The father said to his child, ‘My son, you are here with me always; everything I have is yours. But now we must celebrate and rejoice, because your brother was dead and has come to life again; he was lost and has been found.’”

*[Slight pause]*  
  
**REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS***[Pause after each question.]***(Betty Thompson)**

To whom do you relate in this story: the runaway son, the returning son, the father, the older brother, the unmentioned mother?

The son returned home, not because his relationship with his family was mended, but *because he was hungry.*

What hungers are calling you home - to God, to self, to others?  How do you need to come home?

**COMMUNAL REFLECTION**    (**Betty:**Slide, time 2:00, chime, stop slide**)**

Betty:Next, Deb Ballard will read to us from a homily given by Bishop Kenneth Untener.

**READING 2                                                              (Deb Ballard)**

We have to keep reminding ourselves that this story of the "Prodigal Son" is a parable. That means Jesus composed it, made it up and -- this is the important part -- he chose the particular details to put in the story. So . . . the younger son doesn't lose his inheritance because of bad investments. He squandered it on dissolute living. You notice that when he later returns, his older brother talks about how he swallowed up the inheritance "with prostitutes." Jesus could have left out that detail, but Jesus isn't soft-pedaling the sinfulness of the people he reaches out to.

Also, in composing the story, Jesus could have had him return home for higher motives. As it stands, the younger son says in effect, "I could eat better at home."

Finally, I always wonder why Jesus went and added that final piece of the story. The younger son returns home, there is a great reunion with his father, they have a celebration . . . and that could have been a fine, happy ending. But no. Jesus goes and adds that part about the older son getting miffed.

Remember that this parable was in response to the complaints of the Pharisees and the Scribes that Jesus was welcoming sinners and eating with them. That's us they're talking about -- sinners who are constantly forgiven and loved by God. Jesus knows our motives aren't always perfect, and he knows that in this life things don't always work out smoothly. And this parable describes our relationship to God in real-life terms.

What is really interesting is that, when the curtain comes down, the father and the older son are arguing out in the front yard. That's where the story ends. We don't know what happened. Did the older son finally go in? Or did he stay outside and pout?

*[Slight pause]*

**REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS [Pause after each question.]   (Betty Thompson)**

How would you end this story?

**COMMUNAL REFLECTION    (Betty: Slide, time 2:00, chime, stop slide)**

Betty:  Now Kathy Linabery will continue reading Bishop Ken’s homily.

**READING 3                                                            (Kathy Linabery)**

Afterward, I decided to write an ending of my own. It goes this way:

The father and the older son are arguing in the front yard and ... the mother comes out. She says to the two of them [now, keep in mind that there's a secret training school someplace where every mother in the world is taught to say this...] she says, "Now I have had just about enough!" She goes on. "You're both acting like children and I'm tired of it."

Then she says to her husband, "You've always favored our youngest, and you know it. You take our oldest son for granted. As a matter of fact, you take me for granted. I hardly ever hear you say 'thank-you' except to the hired hands. It's about time you started noticing the rest of your family."

Then, to the older son, "And you . . . you like to be the martyr. You act as if you're the only one who has ever had to go the extra mile, or do things that go unnoticed or un-thanked. Well, get over it. I have to do it and so does everybody else. You have to learn to swallow hard and rise above the little things in life that are unfair. Stop your silly pouting."

Then, the mother goes inside and comes out with the younger son, pulling him by the ear. "And you," she says, "you're acting like a spoiled little prince. You're in there celebrating with your friends and you never even thought to ask about your older brother, or go out to him and apologize for leaving him to do all the work. It's about time you realized that the whole world doesn't revolve around you."

Finally, she says to all three of them: "Now the three of you shake hands and work out your differences some other time. We've got company in there. Get in the house and start acting like a family. And if you can't do that, well there are lots of other places where you can go and get a job feeding the pigs!"

 [Slight pause]

**REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS [Pause after each question.]   (Betty Thompson)**

How does this ending help you appreciate the parable **differently?**

If **you** received less than a sibling or a colleague and thought that you deserved more, how would you feel and how would you resolve the situation?

**COMMUNAL REFLECTION    (Betty: Slide, time 2:00, chime, stop slide)**

**SHARING                                                                                       (Alicia Urban)**

We invite you to briefly share what emerged in **your** heart this morning as you have reflected upon our reading and music.  We welcome everyone who wants to speak, and we also know that the wisdom of this community includes both words shared and silent listening.

So let’s begin in silence as we gather our reflections.

(Pause)

Now who would like to start our sharing?  Remember to unmute yourself to speak and mute yourself again afterwards.

(Sharing)

Thank you.  We have to stop now, and we can continue after the final song, as we often do.

Now Maryann Dolan will lead us in prayer.

**PRAYERS OF THE COMMUNITY                        (Maryann Dolan)**

Our response today will be:  **God of generous mercy, hear our prayer.**

Holy One, help us to be nonjudgmental and welcoming, offering forgiveness and showing unconditional love to all those around us. **We pray: God of generous mercy, hear our prayer.**

For all the people impacted by the invasion of Ukraine: the people living in and defending and fleeing Ukraine, all the leaders making decisions regarding Ukraine, the Russian military and their families, and all peoples of the world watching in solidarity with Ukraine:  **We pray: God of generous mercy, hear our prayer.**

For increased awareness of our internal motivations that hurt our relationships with others and creation; for reconciliation of all broken relationships; and for a greater awareness of Jesus’ presence in our lives, **We pray: God of generous mercy, hear our prayer.**

For a spirit of cooperation among nations; safety for those fleeing oppression and danger; and for policies and borders that welcome the stranger,  **We pray: God of generous mercy, hear our prayer.**

For all the members of the Leadership Conference of Woman Religious who act to seek racial justice for minorities and immigrants, to stop human trafficking, to bring relief to those who are hungry, sick, abused and oppressed; and who act to encourage reverence for all God’s creation. **We pray: God of generous mercy, hear our prayer.**

For your guidance and wisdom, as we walk together with Pope Francis answering the Synodal call to be repairers of the breach of inclusion, and to listen with a synodal heart to the responses of all voices. **We pray: God of generous mercy, hear our prayer.**

Let’s pause in silence to notice what prayer rises in us now.  *[Pause….]*

For what else shall we pray?  Please unmute yourself to speak, and mute yourself afterwards.

(Shared prayers)    **God of generous mercy, hear our prayer.**

O You who love us more than we can imagine, we are grateful for this chance to give you our prayers, spoken and unspoken. We entrust the outcome to you.  Amen.

**OFFERTORY                                             (Bill Cavanaugh and Reggie Ott)**

(Bill)Holy One, we bring you ourselves knowing you accept us just as we are.

(Reggie, singing twice)Take, oh take me as I am,

summon out what I shall be.

Set your seal upon my heart,

and live in me.

(Bill) Reflect on your Lenten intention.  *(Long pause)*

Holy One, we rely on your grace, which we do not take in vain.  We will use our time, our talents, and our treasure to work towards being your ambassadors in the world. Blessed be.

Now Kathy Cavanaugh will lead us in our prayer of communion.

**CELEBRATION OF COMMUNION                                        (Kathy Cavanaugh)**

O Great Love, we are humbled and emboldened

to know that you trust us to be your body in this world.

We are part of that body as we let go of all that separates us from you,

and as we embrace one another and your entire creation with merciful love.

We give you thanks for your presence in and among us.  *[Pause.]*

We remember the night before Jesus died.

At dinner with friends, Jesus knew all that would soon be asked of them,

and, loving them to the end, Jesus showed them how to care for each other

as they went out into the world.

First Jesus washed their feet

and said, “… as I have done for you, you should also do.”

Then he looked at what was in front of them, the bread and the wine,

gifts of Earth and the work of human hands, and blessed them.

So let us, too, invite God right now into what is front and center in our lives

knowing that God will indeed enter what we offer – and bless it. *[Pause.]*

Let us know God within ourselves so that we become God’s living presence in our world.  *[Pause.]*

Holy One, you transform us as you nourish us here.

May we nourish others with your presence.

Amen.

Norb Bufka will lead in the Our Father, Our Mother.

**OUR FATHER, OUR MOTHER                                                    (Norb Bufka)**

Now let us join our hearts as if we could join our hands to pray in harmony with our family throughout the world:

**All (muted):**Our Father, Our Mother, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.

Your kingdom come.  Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our living bread

and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us,

and do not let us fall into temptation, but deliver us from evil

for the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours, now and forever.  Amen.

**FINAL BLESSING                           (Lynn Bufka)**

May the Lord bless and keep you!  
May he make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you.  
And give you his peace.

May our God bless and keep you!  
May she make her face shine upon you and be gracious to you.  
And give you her peace.    Amen.

**INTRO TO CLOSING SONG:                           (Debra Street)**

While Lent is a time of prayer, fasting, and charitable giving in imitation of Jesus’ forty days in the wilderness, we must look at the end toward which this is leading. That end is the same as it was for Jesus:  Jerusalem, where he would be confronted by the very evil he preached against. Our final hymn, “Jerusalem, My Destiny,” captures that reality for us today.

Fr. Richard Rohr reminded us of this on March 15: “In the end, Jesus’ death is a consequence of the hostile response of religious and civil rulers to the style and content of his ministry, to which he was radically faithful with a freedom that would not quit.” We too are called to that fidelity.

**CLOSING SONG - (Debra Street & Keith Miller)**

Jerusalem, My Destiny by Rory Cooney

Refrain: I have fixed my eyes on your hills, Jerusalem my destiny!

Though I cannot see the end for me, I cannot turn away.

We have set our hearts for the way; this journey is our destiny.

Let no-one walk alone. The journey makes us one.

Other spirits, lesser gods, have courted me with lies.

Here among you I have found a truth which bids me rise. Refrain

See, I leave the past behind, a new land calls to me.

Here among you now I find a glimpse of what might be. Refrain

**RESOURCES**

Visitation North Spirituality Center

Bishop Untener’s homilies

Macrina Wiederkehr

The Song of the Seed - A Monastic Way of Tending the Soul

Pgs. 72-73 The Feast of Homecoming