

### Restoring Lost People Is the Most Joyous Feature of the Gospel, But Also It Is the Most Offensive Feature of the Gospel, Because We Find It Hard Not to Be Offended When God Sheds His Grace on Others

"The story from our Gospel lesson today, the story of the 'Prodigal Son,' is arguably the most familiar of all of Jesus' parables," the Rev. Dr. Brook Thelander said in his sermon Sunday. "Because of that, it is also one of the most difficult to hear.

"It follows two parables with similar themes," he continued: "the parable of the Lost Sheep and the parable of the Lost Coin", which, he said, could more aptly be described as the parables of the "Found Sheep" and the "Found Coin", while the "Prodigal Son" parable would be better titled, by referring to the "Loving Father".

"What this shows to me," he continued, is that a great many preachers in America focus a great deal of energy on the conditions addressed by the Gospel rather than the Gospel itself."

The usual interpretation, he said, of the "Prodigal Son" story is simplistically and inaccurately to depict the younger brother as "the fun-loving boy who 'just had to get out of the house'" and the older brother as "a hard-hearted miser who never learned to dance".

"But do you want to know the real pro-



"The Seven Sorrows of the Virgin: The Flight into Egypt", by Albrecht Dürer (1471-1528). © Web Gallery of Art. Sunday we'll hear of the vine-dressers who abuse the owner's servants and kill his son. Jesus quotes Ps. 118:22 about the "stone the builders rejected". Both the rock in the path and the rocky landscape may refer to the rejection of Jesus which sent him into Egypt and later to the Cross—in prodigal grace for us.

blem with this story? It's the *party*. Here I have to admit that I agree somewhat with the older brother. I think he has a point, and I think I agree with his point.

"And what is his point? Well, it's not his younger brother's return home that gets his goat. It's this doggone party. It's not his brother's return that bothers him so much as the music and the dancing.

"I see the older brother's point. Hear his argument: 'If my brother wants to return home, fine, but let him come home to bread and water, not the fattened calf. If he wants to come back, fine, but let him come back and dress up in sackcloth, not a new robe. Let him wear ashes, not a new ring. Let there be tears, not merriment, and let him come back kneeling, not dancing.'

"If there is a part of you—even a small part—that feels the same way today and that identifies with the older brother, then perhaps we are beginning to hear this parable with full force," Pastor Thelander continued. "And what we hear is that God loves people more than anything—especially lost people. Finding and restoring lost people gladden God's heart and are perhaps the most *joyous* feature of (p. 2→)

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**Sun.** 10:00 a.m.: Word & Table service  
11:30 a.m.: Refreshments, conversation  
11:45 a.m.: Post-service discussion.

**The Harbinger will not publish next week.**

**Tuesday 5:30 p.m., Lenten Evening Prayers, then soup-and-bread supper**

#### Holy Week Services

Palm/Passion Sun., April 1, 10 a.m. Good Friday, April 6, 7:30 p.m.

Palm Sun. Evensong, April 1, 6 p.m. Easter Vigil, April 7, 8:00 p.m.

Maundy Thursday, April 5, 7:30 p.m. Easter Sunday, April 8, 10 a.m.

**Readings, 3/25:** Is. 43:16-21; Ps. 126; Phil. 3:8-14; Luke 20:9-19. **4/1, 10 a.m.:** Liturgy of the Palms: Ps. 118:19-29; Luke 19:29-40. Word & Table: Is. 52:13—53:12; Ps. 22:1-11; Phil. 2:5-11; Luke 22:39—23:56. **4/1, 6 p.m.:** Ps. 103; Zech. 9:9-12; 1 Tim. 6:12-16.

**Prayer Emphases:** Botswana; Christian and Missionary Alliance; Revolution Church, Long Beach, CA, and the Rev. David Trotter; The Order of St. Luke; parishioners on Alamo Road.

**(Sermon, cont'd.)** the Gospel. (Also, it is the most *offensive* feature of the Gospel to us, and we find it hard not to be offended when God sheds his grace on others—especially when we question their conduct and character. . . . Our competitive culture has infected us with thinking that says there must always be losers if there are winners. . . . (But) God's love of tax collectors and sinners does not negate his love for Pharisees and Scribes, and God's gracious love of others does not make him any less generous in his . . . grace and love to us.