

Fourth Sunday of Lent

March 10, 2013

**Ashamed No More: God Will Remove Our Disgrace**

2 Corinthians 5:16-21; Luke 15: 1-3, 11b-32

Shame can be a terrible thing,  
leading to unimaginable behavior.

In many cultures there is no forgiveness for shame, only dire consequences.

Kenjiro tells me that in the ancient Japanese culture that this was often the case.

For example, as a result of a samurai bringing great shame upon his lord, the only act that could overcome this shame was an act of honor known as seppuku (harikari) – ritual suicide, usually in front of spectators.

Still in today's world, we hear of honor killings of women who have brought shame upon their family, even if that shame is their being raped.

Though laws forbid such actions, honor killings still occur today.

In the West, we avoid such barbarism, though we have not done so well avoiding shame and guilt – we seem to be better at repressing such feelings, only realizing we need the care of a psychologist or psychiatrist to hold our lives together.

**In the Parable of the Prodigal Son**, we see the younger son wrestling with overcoming the shame he brought upon himself and his family in the way he squandered his inheritance.

We see him rehearsing how he might come back to his father  
– and though he has no hope of ever being restored to sonship  
– no hope of any honor being restored – at least he hopes that he might be able to serve as a slave in his father's household.

I have come to discover that when we say God forgives us our sin, many do not really believe God forgets our sin  
– God remembers our shame, our guilt.

Yet, as we continue to give focus to understanding salvation through the lens of shame and honor, rather than our Western perspectives of judgment and guilt, we keep on discovering that God continually acts in ways which surprise us  
– and one of these ways is that God removes our shame.

God acts in ways which remove our disgrace and transforms our shame into shalom.

This is what is expressed about God in the Parable of the Prodigal Son.

Actually, the younger son who asked for his inheritance is not the only wasteful one in this story  
– **the Father is as well.**

Prodigal comes from *prodigious* – meaning “generous, wasteful, extravagant”  
– and so it expresses both the character of the father, as well as of the younger son.

Let me explain.

Whereas the younger son wasted his father’s inheritance, lavishing it upon himself  
– a kind of wasting we understand, when we think of “wasting.”

Our culture wastes much of what has been entrusted to us. We are no strangers to wasting resources.

**However, the father is also wasteful  
– but in a very different kind of way.**

Rather than shaming the returning son, yielding to the son’s request to become a slave  
– we discover that the father’s action is also “wasteful!”

**It is wasteful in the sense of his being extravagant.**

**The father wastes grace upon his son.**

He is not stingy with his grace  
His is not miserly with his mercy and love  
He is not “green” with his grace

We may agree and say, Yes, he is wasting grace, the son deserves no such grace  
– why so him grace?  
– **but this is not what I mean by the father being wasteful**

**For that is the definition of grace  
– it is an undeserved kindness.**

The father is wasting grace in quite a different way.

The father lavishly pours out his love upon his son;  
– and he keeps on pouring out grace  
– he keeps on pouring out grace until it overflows  
– just as if someone pouring coffee keeps pouring coffee until it overflows the cup, overflows the saucer, spills  
off the table and onto the floor  
– it just keeps coming; **it never stops!**

The father keeps pouring grace upon his son so that it becomes an anointing that overflows and runs down all  
over his life.

And through this, this broken relationship between son and father is restored.

This is a picture of God!  
God freely wastes grace,  
God never stops pouring out grace upon our lives  
For with God there is an abundance of grace!

God is never stingy with grace

God pours out grace to transform our shame into shalom.

- God keeps on pouring out grace and love, mercy and hope upon our lives
- even when our lives of glass are full; God’s love, mercy and grace never ceases.

God does not ration out grace, but God, as the waiting father, always waits for us

- waiting to receive us
- waiting for us to receive God’s embrace
- waiting for us to open wide our lives to God’s ceaseless pouring out of his abundant, wasteful grace and love into our lives.

### **Grace, in the hands of God, is never a limited resource**

Grace is abundant because God is abundant and unlimited;

Grace is rooted in the everlastingness of God

- it is always renewing, always making new
- So let us be open to receive it, let it pour out into our lives, let it overflow into all parts of us, let it overflow our lives and pour into the lives of others.

Paul gives expression to such lavish grace, which transforms shame into shalom, by declaring the new thing that takes place because of Jesus:

“If anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come.”

We might rephrase this saying: In Christ, through Christ, we experience God’s abundant outpouring of God’s grace and mercy and love

Through Christ, we begin to have eyes which see, ears which hear, lives which comprehend the lavishness, the wastefulness of God’s grace.

And as we receive God’s grace overflowing our lives, mercy and forgiveness that has no expiration date,  
– we find ourselves in the midst of new creation

Jesus is not merely one in whom we are to believe to be right with God

- Jesus is the embodiment of God’s poured out grace, God’s poured out love
- And as we open wide our arms, our lives, to receive that all God pours out into us, we are embraced by Christ Jesus

– and as we are embraced, we are transformed!

### **If anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come.”**

But too often we are like the older son – we see grace as being limited

- not enough to go around

If its poured out on sinners, there just is not much left for us who are trying to follow after Jesus.

– and so we envy the one who has been shamed and brought shame, and yet is now restored, made new, flooded with grace and mercy.

But the truth is, once this grace has been wasted on us, we live day by day in the reality of this grace  
– we are immersed in it, we are immersed in the charis of the Spirit

So, receive this never-ending gift of God's grace.

Be embraced by God's everlasting arms and receive the lavishness of grace that God keeps pouring out into our lives  
– whether we are like the younger son or the older son,

**Live in God's grace!**

**Live in the new creation!**