

## Second Tuesday of Easter

'He ran' (Luke 15.20). Just two words - but full of meaning.

*Recap:* The younger son left home with a substantial share of the family fortune and squandered it. He returned penniless and hoped his father might employ him. When his father saw his son in the distance, he was overjoyed and ... 'he ran...'

Now middle-aged, property-owning fathers in the Middle East did not run. For running is undignified. But on this occasion the father was so overjoyed that he forgot about his dignity. He picked up his skirts and *he ran* - a considerable distance too. For he spotted his son 'while he was still a long way off.'

It's clear that welcoming his son in this way carried a high personal cost for the father. Had he waited with calm decorum for the son to come to *him*, he would have survived the incident with his dignity intact. But he didn't. So 'the Parable of the Prodigal Son' could be renamed 'the Parable of the Foolish Father.' Which is good news for us. For the son in the parable represents you and me in our rebellion, our waywardness and with our need for forgiveness and restoration.

The father in the parable represents God: our foolish - because he loves the unworthy - God. ('*God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom...*' 1 Corinthians 1.23-25.)

There's another key character in this story: the dutiful, hardworking elder son. He had good reason to grumble - he'd never had a party in *his* honour. We're not told what happens next. But I'd like to think that the two brothers were reconciled too.

It can be very difficult to take the first step towards reconciliation - especially if we feel we've been wronged. In this situation we might ponder the humility of the prodigal son - and the love of his father. And the grievance felt by the older son, too.

**If you are offering your gift at the altar and remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.**

Matthew 5.23-24

## Second Wednesday of Easter

It was Sunday morning, and I was holding a chalice as I watched people come forward to receive Holy Communion. I have done this a thousand times, and it always gives me a feeling of inner warmth - mainly because of a deep sense of kinship. For these are my brothers and sisters within the Christian family.

This Sunday was different. I felt the same warmth but it was mixed with a measure of confusion. For this particular service was held in the chapel of a maximum-security prison. The men to whom I administered the Communion Cup had committed terrible crimes. Were they *really* my Christian brothers? Was it right to pray for 'the peace of God which passes all understanding'? And what about their victims - who might feel that God's peace is the very last thing those prisoners deserve?

The teaching of Jesus is disturbing. He certainly doesn't condone violence and criminality. But he does insist that nothing - absolutely nothing, however terrible - need bar our entry

into the Kingdom of Heaven. There is a proviso, of course.

And that is repentance - feeling shame, expressing sorrow and regret, seeking forgiveness and attempting restitution. But Jesus makes it clear that a holy life is more - much more - than just keeping the rules. Which is why he famously befriended sinners and outcasts.

St Mark's Gospel (Mark 1.15) summarises Jesus' teaching: 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.' It's all about the possibility of a new start. This is why Jesus' preaching is such good news. It is full of hope. No one - however bad - is beyond God's love. He doesn't condone our past life, but he does assure us that we can leave it behind - and live for others, and for God, in the future.

**For all who exalt themselves will be humbled, but all who humble themselves will be exalted.**

Luke 18.14