

## Mission Reflection

*for the Season of Lent*

Seafarers International House



### Scripture

Now his elder son was in the field; and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. He called one of the slaves and asked what was going on. He replied, “Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has got him back safe and sound.” Then he became angry and refused to go in. His father came out and began to plead with him. But he answered his father, “Listen! For all these years I have been working like a slave for you, and I have never disobeyed your command; yet you have never given me even a young goat so that I might celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours came back, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fatted calf for him!” Then the father said to him, “Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found.”<sup>1</sup>

### Message

How many times in our daily lives have we played the role of older brother in this Gospel drama?

In the role of the older brother, we don’t crave recognition for the work we’ve done. Quite the contrary, we’d be embarrassed by the accolades and attention. We prefer modesty. We sit in or near the last row of pews. We’re so Lutheran.

Our modesty and reserve are tested, however, when one of our siblings gets credit for something we did, or when one of our office colleagues is given recognition for a project that we conceived and developed. In truth, many of our perceived slights are really inconsequential and not worth the time and energy needed to complain. But not always, and in those instances of significant wrongdoing and conflict, where do justice and mercy intersect?

There is a concept of restorative justice – responding to wrongdoing and conflict by seeking to repair the harm done through mutual engagement of the victim and the wrongdoer in their respective needs and obligations.<sup>2</sup>

Setting aside for the moment the conventional understanding of the Parable,<sup>3</sup> who is this older brother in our daily lives — the victim or a jealous whiner? Victims

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need to work through the injury and loss they've experienced. A genuine expression of remorse and contrition by the offending party will facilitate that process. Ideally, an apology is followed by forgiveness, but is the apology a prerequisite?

Last June, the families of the nine people gunned down during a Bible study in Charleston, South Carolina faced the alleged killer and forgave him. The daughter of one victim, Ethel Lance, said, "I will never be able to hold her again. But I forgive you and have mercy on your soul," she said. "It hurts me, it hurts a lot of people, but God forgives you and I forgive you."<sup>4</sup> This is an extraordinary expression of fortitude and faith.

### Prayer

During this Lenten season and in all of our days, be with us, Lord, as we strive to find the intersection of justice and mercy in our daily lives, and lead us away from the path of retribution and hatred and toward the path of compassion and forgiveness. Amen.

1. Luke 15:11-32
2. Christie Billups, "Review of Compassionate Justice: An Interdisciplinary Dialogue with Two Gospel Parables on Law, Crime, and Restorative Justice [Christopher D, Marshall], JOURNAL OF LUTHERAN ETHICS, July 1, 2013
3. The prodigal son as the sinner, the father as God and the older brother as the Pharisees and scribes.
4. Scott Pelley, "Family members to alleged Charleston gunman: I forgive you", CBS News, June 19, 2015

Postscript: Seafarers International House can't get you on board a merchant ship to visit seafarers due to port security restrictions. But we can get you into an immigrant detention center to visit a person seeking asylum from persecution in his or her homeland. Typically, asylum seekers wait six or more months to have their asylum claim processed. During those months, they are kept in a warehouse under constant surveillance with limited visitation privileges. We lead monthly visits to the Elizabeth Detention Center, and you cannot imagine how profoundly grateful the detained person is for a brief visit. Hospitality is transforming for both the visited and the visitor. Call 212-677-4800 for more information.

Seafarers International House serves seafarers and immigrants with pastoral care, hospitality, social assistance, advocacy and prayer in the ports in Baltimore, Connecticut, New Jersey, New York and Philadelphia, and in an 84-room Guesthouse in Manhattan. The Guesthouse accommodates more than seafarers and immigrants. It's available for church gatherings, civic groups and individuals in need of safe, affordable lodging. Our Guesthouse helps them accomplish their mission goals, and their patronage helps us accomplish ours. "Sleep Well By Doing Good."

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