

Heartfelt – March 2013

Family ‘Round the Table

SCRIPTURE Psalm 32, Luke 15:1-3, 11b-32

THEME: Search the Horizon: Celebrating God’s Welcome During Lent

Although Lent is often seen as a time of sacrifice and self-discipline, the Sundays in Lent are meant to be feast days, not counted in the other forty days of the season. As we experience the story of the prodigal son who returns to his loving father, we recognize the Lenten message of the extent of God’s amazing forgiveness and prepare to celebrate God’s welcome extended to everyone.

EATING TOGETHER

- **Decorations:** Use the theme of “Welcome Home,” decorating with streamers, placards, confetti, balloons, and any other enhancements suitable for such an occasion.
- **Menu:** Beef Pot Roast with Vegetables Corn Muffins, Chocolate Pudding, Beverages
- **Blessing:** *Dear God, thank you for reminding us of the assurance of your welcoming arms as we eat this meal of comfort food. Help us to always come home to you for the help we need in life. Amen.*

PLAYING TOGETHER

Activity One: Sorry!®

Materials: Sorry!® game

Directions:

1. Play a game of Sorry!® Follow the directions on the provided with the game.
2. Encourage friendly competition; then discuss the importance of having a “home base” to provide us with safety and security in life.

Activity Two: Bible Spoon Puppets

Materials: wooden spoons or plastic spoons (one for each), permanent markers, scraps of fabric or pieces of construction paper

Directions:

1. Draw a face on the on the rounded side of the spoon.
2. Cut a piece of fabric or construction paper and glue it onto the handle as clothing.
3. After reading the story in Luke 15:11b-32, invite family members to choose a character from the story for their puppet.
4. Have the puppets act out the story as it is read a second time.

Activity Three: Miss Fannie's Hat

Materials: copy of *Miss Fannie's Hat* (Karon, Jan; Illustrated by Toni Goffe. Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 1998)

Directions:

1. Check your local library or church library for the availability of this book. If you cannot find it or decide not to use it, some changes may need to be made in the Bible study.
2. Read the book *Miss Fannie's Hat* and talk about the part of the story that you each like best.

STUDYING GOD'S WORD TOGETHER

- Choose a family member to locate Luke 15:11b-32 in a Bible and read the passage aloud.

The Story of the Lost Son [from The Message]

Then he said, "There was once a man who had two sons. The younger said to his father, 'Father, I want right now what's coming to me.'

"So the father divided the property between them. It wasn't long before the younger son packed his bags and left for a distant country. There, undisciplined and dissipated, he wasted everything he had. After he had gone through all his money, there was a bad famine all through that country and he began to hurt. He signed on with a citizen there who assigned him to his fields to slop the pigs. He was so hungry he would have eaten the corncobs in the pig slop, but no one would give him any.

"That brought him to his senses. He said, 'All those farmhands working for my father sit down to three meals a day, and here I am starving to death. I'm going back to my father. I'll say to him, Father, I've sinned against God, I've sinned before you; I don't deserve to be called your son. Take me on as a hired hand.' He got right up and went home to his father.

"When he was still a long way off, his father saw him. His heart pounding, he ran out, embraced him, and kissed him. The son started his speech: 'Father, I've sinned against God, I've sinned before you; I don't deserve to be called your son ever again.'

"But the father wasn't listening. He was calling to the servants, 'Quick. Bring a clean set of clothes and dress him. Put the family ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Then get a grain-fed heifer and roast it. We're going to feast! We're going to have a wonderful time! My son is here—given up for dead and now alive! Given up for lost and now found!' And they began to have a wonderful time.

"All this time his older son was out in the field. When the day's work was done he came in. As he approached the house, he heard the music and dancing. Calling over one of the houseboys, he asked what was going on. He told him, 'Your brother came home. Your father has ordered a feast—barbecued beef!—because he has him home safe and sound.'

"The older brother stalked off in an angry sulk and refused to join in. His father came out and tried to talk to him, but he wouldn't listen. The son said, 'Look how many years I've stayed here serving you, never giving you one moment of grief, but have you ever thrown a party for me and my friends? Then this son of yours who has thrown away your money on whores shows up and you go all out with a feast!'

“His father said, ‘Son, you don’t understand. You’re with me all the time, and everything that is mine is yours—but this is a wonderful time, and we had to celebrate. This brother of yours was dead, and he’s alive! He was lost, and he’s found!’”

- Share that we are studying a famous story from the Bible about forgiveness. Jesus told this story about a man whose son demanded money and then left home to spend it in ways that would disappoint his father. When the money was all gone, the son realized the poor choices he had made and he planned to go home. He realized he no longer deserved to be treated like a son. However, when he returned home, the son discovered that his father had been waiting, searching the horizon every day for his return. The father welcomed him with open arms and forgave him all his poor behavior. He even planned a welcome home party to celebrate his son’s return.

Jesus told this story as a parable, a story with a lesson about God’s love. Just like the patient and forgiving father, God waits for each person to realize the need to “return home” to God. What a celebration there must be in heaven when God’s children ask for forgiveness!

During the forty days of Lent, we think about the importance of forgiveness and spend time in prayer and study as we seek God’s direction for our lives. However, if we count the actual days between Ash Wednesday and Easter Sunday, we find that there are really forty-six days. The extra six days are the Sundays. These days are not included in our time of repentance and self-denial. The Sundays are meant to be feast days, times of celebration when we remember that Jesus has purchased our forgiveness and that God welcomes us with open arms. We are God’s children, and when we come home seeking God’s grace, there is great celebration in heaven!

In the book **Miss Fannie’s Hat**, we learn about the joys that come to us when we give ourselves completely to God’s care. When ninety-nine-year-old Miss Fannie gives up her favorite straw hat, the one with pink roses, to help raise money for her church, she receives an unexpected reward. We learn from her story, and from the Sundays during Lent, is that the reward of trusting God far outweighs any sacrifice we might have made. We learn the Good News that a son is forgiven and welcomed home, we are delighted that a sacrificed hat becomes the symbol of the joy of giving, and we celebrate that the Sunday meals shared during Lent remind us of the joys of resurrection.

- **Reflection Questions for the Family**

1. Can you think of a time when someone made you feel very welcome? What did they do?
2. What can we learn from each of the characters in the parable?
3. What could we do during the remaining Sundays of Lent to remember the joy of Jesus’ resurrection?
4. How do we express welcome and extend comfort to our guests? What could we do to be even more welcoming?

PRAYING TOGETHER

- Light a worship candle and place the open Bible next to it.
- Listen to a recording of the hymn *Just As I Am* at (www.oremus.org/hymnal/j/j257.html) or sing the first verse as a group.
- Together repeat these words from Psalm 32:1 as an affirmation: *Happy are those whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.*
- Invite family members to share joys and concerns and weave them into a prayer, closing with the following: *Prayer: Dear God, thank you for always being willing to welcome us into your family. Help us to see the opportunities for celebrating the joy of belonging to you. Amen.*