

Spiritually Speaking

Lent a Time to Return to the Father

By Fr. Thankachan Joseph

As our Lenten observances move into the fourth week, and I am reflecting on the personalities of three persons mentioned in the parable of the Prodigal Son found in the Gospel of Luke (15:11-32).

The Loving Father resembles a modern father who gives into his children out of love. When the younger boy demands his share of property, the father allows this, for if forced to stay home, home would be a prison for him. But the father knows that his son is immature and knows not what he is doing. After the son's premature departure from home, the father waits on his front porch every night, watching the road from the city, hoping that some realization will dawn on the son. People who watch him say, "Hey, Mister, you ought to be declared 'Father of the year.'" But the father continues to wait every night until darkness, when he goes inside to bed, saying a tearful prayer for his lost but always dear son, as many parents do these days. Then one evening, his heart explodes with excitement. He sees a figure coming down the road. He can tell... it is his son coming home! The father runs down the road, his heart pounding, tears of relief rolling down his cheeks. He hugs his boy tightly, his wracking sobs of joy shaking his body. The boy is saying something about not being worthy to come home as a son and asking only to hire on as a field worker. The father hears nothing of this. His heart is saying, "I don't care where you've been or what you've done. All I care about is that you are home and I love you!" He doesn't wait to hear what the son has done with his wealth, doesn't bother with what is lost. He is happy that he has back his lost son. Here we have a beautiful example heavenly love, care, and affection that transcends human love.

The Older Son: How wonderful it would have been if the older son had said, "O how glad I am! The fact that my brother has come home shows that he has changed. I've missed him so much. I have prayed for his return. I've shared with Father concern for his safety. I

must hurry to embrace him." But he lacks concern and brotherly love. "The way my father treated my younger brother was a slap on my face." The elder son has almost lost himself in his dad's wealth. When his brother returns, he feels the need to share, fears losing the castle he has built in his dreams, enjoying everything by himself alone.

The Prodigal Son: The younger son feels that he has outgrown his father, and wants no part of his father's life style or home. He asks his father to give to him the portion of the estate that he would inherit upon his father's death. He thinks he will be happier away from home, that living far away from home will bring him happiness, for he would no longer be under parental control, which seems the same way many present-day youngsters feel. The far country promised freedom but actually enslaved the young man. While his money lasted, he had some fair-weather friends, but when the money ran short, he was reduced to deprivation. He hired out to a gentile to feed the gentile's swine and ended up eating animal food. It was under such misery that he thought of his parents and home. He thought, "The hired servants at home fare well. Father is a good man. I'll go back to him, confess my sin, and ask him to accept me as a hired servant." To come back home was no easy job. It called for a lot of humility and courage. He knew what people were thinking and saying about him. But his conviction and contrition lead him back home.

Some people are lost like sheep, losing their way by careless drifting. Some, through life's circumstances, are misplaced like a lost coin. Others, like the young son, are lost through willful rebellion. Still others are lost as the older brother was - at home yet far from the father, full of hate, self-righteousness, prejudice, envy and unforgiveness. When a sheep is found, the shepherd rejoices; when a coin is found, the woman rejoices; when a son is found, the father rejoices; when a sinner repents, God rejoices. Now is the day of salvation.



Fr. Thankachan Joseph

Good News Only

By Doris Brosnan

It is official: Unless something interfered on Sunday at 8:33 AM, the sun shone directly on the earth's equator, so the daylight 12 hours, 9 minutes, and 58 seconds and the sunless hours were close to equal. Thus, the Vernal/Spring Equinox. Spring is now official.

More weekend fun in Heppner last week: Murray's beer and wine event on Friday drew another crowd, and the luck of the Irish held inclement weather at bay on Saturday for the bull riders and fans. Next door on Saturday, browsers could check out the crafts show in the fair building.

Judy Handbury wants to encourage other senior citizens to take CAPECO and Bucknum's up on their invitation to free lunches on Wednesdays. (Reported in this column two weeks ago.) Last Wednesday, the Handburys tried the lunch for the first time and couldn't eat everything on their plates of very good Southwest chicken salad and side dishes. Handburys chose to stay at Bucknum's for the socialization of lunch with others, but Judy reminds us that take-out is also available. Though the lunches are free, donations to help sustain the program are welcomed. Time to call and sign up?

As we view the changing landscape of our part of Eastern Oregon, with the importance of renewable energy in mind, we can also keep in mind the good news that some of our citizens continue to farm their lands and/or raise livestock. Not an easy way to make a living but a way of living so important to our pantries, cupboards, refrigerators and freezers, tables, and stomachs. Hug a Farmer or Rancher today.

I had a change of pace last week-plus. On Sunday, the 13th, I "motored" to Salem to house- and dog-sit for our daughter while that family's members were able to enjoy some long-awaited vacations with extended families. Of course, I included visits with Danny, whose illness progresses, and with some Salem friends. For this trip, I enjoyed my traveling companion, Pat Prock of Pendleton, who met her

sister Ferne in Salem for a continued trip to Roseburg for the week. Pat joined me again yesterday for the trip back home.

David and April Sykes visited their daughter, Camille Sykes, her partner Eddie Gonzales and their three-year old Oscar recently. While there they enjoyed dinner at Olive Garden along with Eddie's parents, Frank and Naomi Gonzales of Wilsonville, and a family friend.

Chris and Rachel Sykes and their kids, Waylon, three, and Sophie, one, spent the St. Patrick's weekend with the Sykes family in Heppner. They enjoyed the parade and festivities and the grandparents got to babysit while Chris and Rachel visited with friends. D

Dan and Sandi Carlson were honored to be judges at the Oregon FFA Convention at the Deschutes Expo in Redmond, March 17-20. Sandi reports that the energy generated by the students, so full of life, was great.

HHS FFA members also attended that convention, and kudos go out to Blake Carter and Hailey Cunningham for earning the state FFA degree, the highest award in the state, and to their chapter and fellow members for other recognitions bestowed.

Congratulations, again, to four HHS football players: Brock Hisler selected to be a player on this year's East Shrine team; and Kason Cimmiyotti, Jace Coe, and Conor Brosnan chosen as alternates.

This is spring-vacation week for Oregon colleges and high schools, so several college students have returned to Heppner, as some local families of high school students have hit the roads for the week's adventures elsewhere. And good weather is forecasted for most of the remaining week.

Readers of the GT will appreciate your tidbits of good news, so we hope you will take a few minutes to send yours to dbrosnan123@gmail.com or call 541-223-1490. We can all appreciate some precious, positive moments in our days!

Here's hoping that some good news comes to everyone reading this.

Heppner schools receive science books

The Outstanding Science Trade Books (OSTB) 2022 project culminated this month with the nominated books going to the Heppner school libraries and classrooms. The project was spearheaded by Sarah Carlson, Ione, who is one of a nine-member national panel for selecting the books for the annual list. The Children's Book Council and the National Science Teaching Association (NSTA) have coordinated on the review and selection of the OSTB list for the past 50 years. Carlson, a local retired science teacher and member of NSTA, was selected to serve on the panel for three years. Each year 250-300 newly published K-12 science trade books are nominated for the award. The publishers send their nominations to each panel member who has 3 months to receive, read, and review the books. Then, the panel meets to decide which books should be on the OSTB list.

This year, Carlson worked with the Heppner community in reading and reviewing the books. The Flood Town Bookstore served as the repository for the books during the process. Each book was reviewed for its science content, illustrations, activities, format and design. Heppner readers/reviewers were Andrea Nelson, Cara

Osmin, Doris Brosnan, Molly Rill, Mary Hague-wood, Jan Huddleston, Karen Thompson, Sharon Harrison, Sally Walker, Ann Spicer, and Kristi Edmundson Smalley. Carlson says "Without the volunteer help of community readers, thoughtful deserving reviews would be difficult given the time constraints of the selection process."

With the release of the 2022 OSTB list, the Heppner teachers were invited to select books for their classrooms. "The best part of the project is giving the books away, and knowing that young readers and classroom teachers have current outstanding science trade books to use and enjoy," said Carlson. Andrea Nelson, the STEAM teacher at HES and owner of Flood Town Books, said "It was such a fun experience and wonderful way of sharing science books with teachers. The books I received for my classroom have been a great addition and the children have already spent time enjoying them. My personal favorite was "The Beak Book" which explored different kinds of bird beaks around the world."

The 2022 OSTB list can be found at <https://www.cb-cbooks.org/readers/reading-lists/outstanding-science-lists/>

Farmers market to hold vendors' meeting



Charlie Nelson samples some of his own merchandise during the 2021 farmers market. -Photo By Andrea Nelson

Willow Creek Farmers Market will hold a vendors' meeting Tuesday, April 26, at 6 p.m. The meeting will be held at Flood Town Books, 413 N. Main St., Heppner.

All vendors and interested vendors are encouraged to attend and give their input on the 2022

market season. Topics will include market dates and times, as well as other organizational business. Anyone who cannot attend the meeting can give input by emailing willowcreek-fm@gmail.com or calling Andrea Di Salvo at 757-285-5792.

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