

Ministry of reconciliation

By [Diane Roth](#)

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It is probably in my top five favorite scripture passages in the whole Bible. We are reading it this Sunday, the fourth Sunday in Lent. It comes up every three years. It is from 2 Corinthians.

"So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!"

It is the middle of Lent, but this verse makes me feel like it is Easter: the eighth day of creation. It is the middle of Lent, but I want to go to the tomb and mistake Jesus for the gardener, planting seeds of the new creation.

It is probably in my top five favorite scripture passages in the whole Bible, but I'm not preaching on 2 Corinthians this Sunday. Instead, I'm preaching on Luke. The prodigal son. Again.

You would think I would run out of things to say about the prodigal son, or his older brother, or his father. You would think that I would be chafing at the bit to preach on one of my top five favorite scripture passages in the Bible instead.

But the story gets me every time.

Every time I read I see a new detail that I never saw before. The older brother mentioned prostitutes in his speech to his father. Who said anything about prostitutes? Why does the story say the younger son "came to himself" instead of "repented"? Is it possible that the younger son didn't repent after all? What about that father? Is he loving, or is he just a soft touch for his younger son?

For some reason, I can't help reading this story in the light of one of my top five favorite Bible passages. It's the next verse, right after the one that I quoted, "All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself in Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation."

The ministry of reconciliation.

So right now, when I think of this story from Luke, this story about a family, I'm not thinking about a particular verse, or a particular detail, or even a particular character in the story. But I'm thinking about a scene. The younger son is inside, at the feast. The older son is outside, with the father. You can hear the music in the background as the father pleads with his son, whom he loves. Then I think of the scene earlier, when the father runs to the younger son, who may or may not really be repentant, who might be home for a few weeks and then take the money and run again. Or, he might truly be transformed by the father's love. It could go either way.

I love this passage from 2 Corinthians, where Paul tells us that God has given us the ministry of reconciliation.

And then I read the parable of the prodigal son, and I realize how messy and risky reconciliation is. Many things could go wrong. You could get hurt, taken advantage of. You could be disrespected, rejected. You're not in it for the prestige, or because the pay is good.

So I am haunted by the end of the parable of the prodigal son, because it ends with estrangement, not reconciliation, with one son outside, and the other son inside. They do not know yet that they are brothers.

Who will tell them? Who will tell us?

It is messy work, and risky, but God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, all of us: the winners and the losers, the repentant and unrepentant, the refugees and the homeless and the rich and the successful, the workaholics and the con artists.

Who will tell them? Who will tell us?

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