

Lent 4C 27 March 2022
Luke 15:1-3,11b-32
St Peter's Lutheran Church Elizabeth
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Grace and peace to you from God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

And having risen up he went to his father. But while he was far distant, his father saw him and was moved with compassion and he ran and fell on the neck of his son and kissed him fervently [my translation from the Greek]. Let's pray: . . .

When you give God an inch, he'll give you a mile. When you're still "far distant", he'll come to you. The eye of God's love is far brighter than the glow of our faith. God stoops from his throne of glory to fall upon the necks of repentant sinners. If you've ever experienced God's arm around you and his lips kissing you fervently, then you understand more than pastors or books could ever tell you about his love.

The father "saw" his son. He saw who it was; where he'd come from; the filth on his hands and feet; his rags; his remorseful look; what he'd been; what he was; and sees what he will soon be. As God gazes upon you, love dances in his eyes, and he feels for you. Your state of poverty, anxiety, and hunger touches him to the core. God has a way of seeing right through you as if you're made of glass; he sees all your past, present and future.

The father also "ran." The feet of forgiveness are swift. God hurtles towards you, driven by his compassion. The father ran and fell on his son's neck and kissed him. He may have been out of breath, but he wasn't out of love. God's compassion is explosive. He's slow to anger, but quick to bless. He doesn't even pause to consider how he'll show his love for you; he decided that long ago in the eternal covenant.

"He fell on the neck of his son and kissed him... fervently." Today, it is my privilege to unpack what this fervent kissing means for you.

1. First, fervent kissing means: FERVENT LOVE.

It means love truly felt; God never gives an expression of love without feeling it in his infinite heart. God will never give a Judas-kiss, and betray those he embraces. There's no hypocrisy with God. God loves repentant sinners! You who repent, and come to him, will discover how greatly he loves you. You can't measure the love he has for you. He's loved you from before the foundation of the world, and he'll love you when time ceases. God has immeasurable love for sinners who cast themselves on his mercy! That's the way God receives you whom he saves, indulging you with boundless grace and overflowing love.

2. Second, fervent kissing means: FERVENT FORGIVENESS.

Remember, you are forgiven before you even confess your sins. Christ has washed you clean from your sins in his own blood. The portrayal of the prodigal perfectly reflects your own lives. His father kissed him with the kiss of forgiveness; and yet, the young man went on to say, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no more worthy to be called your son."

But God's kisses say, "your sin is all gone, and will never be mentioned again. Come to my heart, my child! I've not only forgiven, but also forgotten. I'll never love you any less. I'll never treat you as though you're an unworthy and untrustworthy person. I'm simply delighted you're back; you're so precious to me."

God kisses all your sin away; and when it rises, he kisses it away again; and when you think of it with shame, he gives you another kiss; and when you blush at the memory of your evil deeds, he kisses you again and again, to remind you that you're fully and freely forgiven.

3. Third, fervent kissing means: FULL RESTORATION.

The prodigal planned to say to his father, "Treat me like one of your hired hands," but his father stopped him with a kiss. By that kiss, his sonship was acknowledged. "You are my son. Despite all that you've done, you belong to me; however far you've gone in vice and folly, I accept you. You're bone of my bone, and flesh of my flesh." Saints, God loves a repentant sinner. Confess your sins through Jesus. He will accept you. He will gladly receive you; for he's always ready for the day you return.

Furthermore, all your privileges will be restored. Along with the many kisses, the father dresses his son with the best robe; puts a ring on his finger, and shoes on his feet. He feeds him the best food, and throws a party for him. He kisses him again and again, because he knows his own child, and feels his fatherly heart yearning for him. He kisses him fervently to let him know that their relationship is full restored.

4. Fourth, fervent kissing means: GREAT JOY.

The father's heart overflows with gladness and he can't restrain his delight. The father kisses his son, stands back to look at him, and kisses him again. Then he walks away to make preparations for a celebration, turns, and then comes back and gives his son another kiss. He's so happy. His heart races; he can't wait for the music to strike up; he wants to dance; but in the meantime, he's happy to gaze upon his long-lost child. God gazes upon you; his eyes transfixed, his heart full of delight at the very sight of you, when you turn your face to him.

Surely that's the teaching of the prophet's words: "The Lord, your God, is in your midst, . . . he will rejoice over you with gladness, he will renew you in his love; he will exult over you with loud singing" (Zephaniah 3:17). God sings when a wandering sinner returns to him. He rejoices in your return, and all of heaven shares in his joy.

5. Fifth, fervent kissing means: OVERFLOWING COMFORT.

"Oh, the past, my Father!" as you bemoan the thought of wasted years; yet, no sooner is it said than you receive another kiss. Father says, "Never mind the past; I've buried it in a sealed tomb and forgotten it."

"The present, my Father. I'm in a dreadful state!" Another kiss comes saying, "Never mind the present. I love you as you are. You are pure and spotless in Christ, and since you are precious in my sight, I love you. Through my dear Son you're welcome home."

"The future, my Father. What if I go astray again?" Again, another holy kiss arrives announcing, "I'll see to the future, my child; my love is so strong for you that I'll always find you; I'll never let you go. I'll also give you a new heart, and I'll put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and you shall keep my judgements, and do them."

Whatever troubled the son, the father gave him a kiss to set everything right. Likewise, God has a kiss for every one of you, every time you're beset by trouble or dismay. Father's promises belong to every repentant sinner who believes in his Son, Jesus Christ.

6. Sixth, fervent kissing means: STRONG ASSURANCE.

The father kissed his son fervently to make him absolutely certain that it was all real. His father repeated the signs of his love so that his son might be fully assured of its reality.

Some of you were brought so low before you were converted, that God gave you an excess of joy when he saved you, that you might never forget it. Many of you have known his kisses since birth. When the devil says to me, "You're no child of God," I reply, "Satan, you have far greater knowledge than I, and you're the craftiest and most cunning liar. But Christ made me his own when he died on the cross for me, was raised to new life for me, ascended to the right hand of Father for me, baptised me, gave me the gift of faith and Holy Spirit to guide me and teach me. All this he did for me and I contributed nothing. That's what a loving Father does." That's an argument which the devil can't answer, because he can't make me believe that Christ never happened. I cling to Father's fervent kisses and his baptismal promise.

May you continue to receive many kisses to give you strong assurance and remind you of the joy of your adoption as God's child through holy baptism.

7. Seventh, fervent kissing means: INTIMATE COMMUNION.

This kissing also preceded the table where they gathered in fellowship. The prodigal sat at his father's table, and ate of the fatted calf; but before that, his father kissed him. Without the previous kisses of love, the son would scarcely have dared to sit at the feast. The communion table to which you are invited, is very sweet. To eat the flesh and drink the blood of Jesus in Holy Communion, is to kiss Jesus - a blessed and holy thing. But again, before you even contemplate this beautiful, holy union, God has already communed with you by way of his love-kiss. It's intimate, ravishing, and sweet.

May the Lord shower you with loving kisses from his lips, and the fragrance of his divine, loving forgiveness, linger on your lips forever! Amen.

Let's pray together: **Lord, give to many poor trembling souls the will to come to you! Bring many sinners to your blessed feet, and while they're still far distant, run and meet them; fall on their neck, give them many kisses of love, and fill them with heavenly delight, for the sake of Jesus Christ! Amen.**

And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.