



# PRISONS WEEK 2008 RESOURCES

## SERMON OUTLINE

### Realising the need for change, Repentance, Forgiveness, Support

#### The prodigal son: Luke 15, 11-32

"But when he came to himself....." (v17)

"Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you....." (v21)

"While he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him." (v20)

"This brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found." (v32)

But what about the elder brother? Does he accept what his father says? Does he give his brother a chance? Or does he continue in his own bitterness and resentment? We are not told!

Who was right, the father or the elder brother? How does our answer to this question square with our attitude to offenders? In other words, do our actions match up with the faith we profess?

#### Jesus and Zacchaeus: Luke 19, 1-10

"He was trying to see who Jesus was" (v3)

"If I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will pay back four times as much." (v8)

"Today salvation has come to this house." (v9)

"All who saw it began to grumble...." (v7)

Zacchaeus is drawn to find out more about Jesus, who then calls him to himself. Zacchaeus cannot stand before Jesus without repenting. He tells Jesus how he wants to change his life. It is then that Jesus forgives him and commends him to the crowd, "he too is a son of Abraham."

If we had been in that crowd, would we have rejoiced with Zacchaeus or would we have grumbled with the majority? A chaplain had talked about the Zacchaeus story in chapel, pointing out that Jesus forgives even those who are most reviled by society. A prisoner who had been listening attentively commented, "That's all very well; Jesus may have forgiven him but would the crowd give him a chance to change his life?" Would they? Would we?

Prisoners are part of our society just as much as we are and are created and loved by God just as we are. As tax payers we own prisons, but do we "own" them by accepting responsibility for them and those who live and work in them? Jesus says we should in Matthew 25, 43-46; the letter to the Hebrews 13, 3 says we should.

The stories of the prodigal and of Zacchaeus show us that Jesus requires us to continue his work in the task of forgiveness and support.

#### What can we do?

- Obtain the CCJF booklet "What can I do?" (Available from CCJF online)
- Start a peace & justice group in your church or gathering
- Contact the chaplaincy in your nearest prison
- Ask about Community Chaplaincy
- Find out about mentoring and befriending opportunities (e.g. through Prison Reform Trust)
- Join a prayer group (e.g. a branch of Prison Fellowship)
- Think about the example of the two ladies who, every month, walk around the outside of a South West prison praying for all inside its walls.

Prisons week 16<sup>th</sup>-22<sup>nd</sup> Nov 2008

[www.prisonsw.org](http://www.prisonsw.org)

Encouraging prayer for, and raising awareness of, the needs of prisoners and their families, victims of offenders, prisons staff and all those who care.