

## **Worship 27<sup>th</sup> March 2022**

### **Call to Worship**

God's reach is endless.

**God's mercy is unstoppable.**

God's grace is lavish.

**God's love is constant.**

God's wisdom is vast.

**God's hope is stubborn.**

God's presence is here—

**with us, among us, moving through us.**

Breathe easy. Breathe deeply.

**We are in God's house.**

Let us worship the One who welcomes us home.

### **Opening hymn:**

[https://www.resoundworship.org/song/you lead us through the wilderness](https://www.resoundworship.org/song/you-lead-us-through-the-wilderness)

### **Call to Confession**

If you ask any parent with a teenager what it's like to wait up for their child to meet curfew, they will tell you—they're standing at the door. The porch light is on. No one can sleep until that child is home safe.

Friends, I think God is like that for us. The porch light is on. The door is unlocked.

We might be late for curfew, but God is just so glad we're home.

So let us pray the prayer of confession together, trusting that no matter what we do

or what we leave undone, the porch light is always on. Let us pray. . .

### **Prayer of Confession**

The prodigal son isn't given a name, but we know his name.

It sounds like ours. And we know his story.

It sounds like ours. For who among us hasn't burned a bridge?

Who among us hasn't forgotten that we belong to one another?

Who among us has not ached for home?

The prodigal son isn't given a name, but we know his name.  
Forgive us God. We want to come home.

### **Words of Forgiveness**

Family of faith, the word 'prodigal' can be defined as wasteful or imprudent, hence the name, "Prodigal Son." However, 'prodigal' can also be described as extravagant and excessive.

Friends, we worship a prodigal God—a God who is extravagant in mercy and excessive in grace.

For no matter how many times we run, no matter how far we go or how lost we get, God is standing at the end of the driveway waiting for us. The doors are open.

The feast is for you. This grace is extravagant.

**Thanks be to God, amen.**

### **Hymn:**

[https://resoundworship.org/song/you are good and forgiving](https://resoundworship.org/song/you-are-good-and-forgiving)

### **Prayer for Illumination**

God of open doors,

We often long to come home to you,

to love,

and to ourselves,

but we aren't always sure how to get there.

We know that we need you,

but the road back to you is heavy with distractions.

So if we can dare to be so forward, we pray—

reach into the cacophony of our hearts and minds and make yourself known.

Quiet everything but your Word for us today.

Leave us awestruck.

Drown out the distractions.

Come as thunder or come as a still, small voice;

we don't care which, we just pray that you will come.

Turn on the light.

Speak through these words.

Find the parts of us that are lost.

With hope we pray, amen.

**Scripture:** 2 Corinthians 5:16-21

From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, we know him no longer in that way. So, if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. So, we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

**Kids Story**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DJgROx4wFKM>

**Reflection:**

LIFE RESTORED (Luke 15:1-3, 11b-32)

Life squandered and spent  
on quickly passing pleasures  
becomes meaningless.

Finding life again  
might include humility  
in owning past ways.

And in the process  
accepting that life is a gift  
not a transaction.

Embracing that gift  
is to welcome life – restored in all its fullness.

Jeff Shrowder, 2022

The story of two brothers and their father is perhaps one of the most well-known, and perhaps well-loved tales of the parables that Jesus shared with his disciples. The story of one who was lost and then found, the story of jealousy from the brother that had always been in the company of the father, and the abundant joy of the father when he realized what he thought had been lost forever was in fact walking towards him.

The prodigal son parable is but one of three stories Jesus told in the context of the questioning and statements that the pharisees were making to Jesus – they were upset that he was eating with and welcoming sinners. So, in response Jesus tells them the parables of the lost sheep, the lost coin and finally today's focus the lost son or perhaps more honestly the lost sons.

The parable begins with the son asking for his inheritance before the father has died. – This is considered to be scandalous. By asking for his inheritance the son is rejecting his father and family and saying, “I wish you were dead.”

These days we might advance some of our inheritance to our children, perhaps the most likely way if we are fortunate enough would be to assist them into their first home or purchase their first car. Though this would be in the form of cash. The inheritance was not money, but livestock and mainly: land. This is land what would have been in the family for generations. Realizing the value of the land and the livestock to enable an early inheritance would be incredibly disruptive, like carving off a runoff block, or enabling outsiders to now live within close confines of the family unit.

After a while the son comes back to the father, after all his other options have been exhausted.

Does he seek Repentance?

Not really. The son never expresses regret - only a fear of dying and a wish to be filled. The focus remains on himself, not on what he has done to others.

This is emphasized in his planned confession, “I have sinned against heaven and against you.” which is a paraphrase of Pharaoh’s declaration to Moses to get the plagues to stop, “I have sinned against the LORD your God, and against you.” As we know, Pharaoh was not repentant, but wanted to stop suffering

Our usual response to such wasteful and unrepentant self-centered behavior is probably reflected in the reaction we see in the older son, the son that stayed with the father. The story is surprising by the father’s reaction, despite the suffering that the younger son has inflicted. The father’s reaction is remarkable.

He is shameful in how he accepts this son who had disgraced him, even going so far as to run (a most undignified act) to welcome him home.

Peter Lockhart writes “This may not seem like much to us but a man who ran like this in Jesus’ time would have been bringing shame on himself. It was below his station and more than that in the act of running he would have exposed his legs in a way which would have been considered indecent. I am reminded at this moment in the story of when King danced with such joy and enthusiasm that his robes also flew up inappropriately. The father risks bringing shame on himself in order to greet the son. This is the depth of his love; he is willing to shame himself and expose his legs, even before the son has offered his confession.”

We may feel the climax of the story is the father welcoming the younger son home with a lavish party, a fattened calf may well feed 100 people. But rather it is the quiet taking aside of the older brother by the father. You see the older son in many ways has just become like the younger one. Believing he is entitled to his father’s possessions, separating himself from the family, and disrespecting his father. Just like the pharisees who see themselves as people that do everything right the older brother misses the point.

This parable is ultimately about the father’s abundant grace. It isn’t a story about fairness. The much-loved hymn amazing grace speaks truths to us about God. And our relationship with God. We often sing

it at funerals. As we remember and celebrate the grace that allows us to live as God's beloved. We don't worship a God of abundant fairness, rather we worship a God of abundant Grace.

That is a very good thing for all of us to remember, as we journey through life and relationship with our God. Because at different times of our lives and faith journeys we can be the older son, wondering why God would love this one whom we might consider to be less worthy of love, or the younger son who has come to our senses and returns to relationship with God, or sometimes we can be the Pharisees grumbling about how the kingdom of God really is, not in line with our expectations or how we might like God to react.

Perhaps a big question that isn't answered is: were the brothers ever reconciled to one another? The bible doesn't say what the state of their relationship was following the party and the cleaning up was all done, I wonder what you think might have happened to that families' dynamics. I would think if we followed most human families there would have been a long time if at all before full reconciliation occurred.

Our letter to the Corinthians today speaks about that topic that I think many of us find difficult, I know I do, reconciliation. There is so many areas in life that when the time is right reconciliation will be important. One day hopefully Russia and Ukraine can live fulfilled lives as neighbours. A number of churches and workplaces may need reconciliation as vaccine requirements are lessened as we track slowly towards our new normal. Those on both sides may have feelings of isolation and being let down by the other and by the government. And in our own families and relationships we may have reconciliation tasks under way or needing to be started.

2 Corinthians is one of Paul's most personal and heartfelt letters... He and the Corinthian congregation had a serious conflict that enabled rival missionaries to question his ministry and lead the Corinthian church in directions he didn't like.

When a block of scripture begins with "From now on", it is important that we look at what precedes it, even if it is not in the lectionary

reading: in this case “If we are crazy, it’s for God’s sake. If we are rational, it’s for your sake. The love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: one died for the sake of all; therefore, all died. He died for the sake of all so that those who are alive should live not for themselves but for the one who died for them and was raised.”

Keith Anderson writes about Paul: In response, Paul urges those believers to engage in a “ministry of reconciliation.” Recounting how we have been reconciled to God through the death and resurrection of Jesus, he implores the Corinthians to be reconciled to one another, “From now on,” he writes, “we regard no one from a human point of view...if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation.” Truth be told, we have a difficult time these days even seeing one another from a human point of view — seeing each other’s humanity and as fellow pilgrims on our earthly pilgrimage — rather than a caricature of a political platform or a potential threat. More than ever, we need to rediscover our common humanity — but Paul calls us further. He calls the Corinthians and us to regard one another as beloved children, faithful and flawed, of the same God — a God whose chief work in Christ on the cross was reconciliation.”

The late Bishop Desmond Tutu spoke about reconciliation in South Africa. “For our nation to heal and become a more humane place, we had to embrace our enemies as well as our friends. The same is true the world over. True enduring peace—between countries, within a country, within a community, within a family—requires real reconciliation between former enemies and even between loved ones who have struggled with one another. How could anyone really think that true reconciliation could avoid a proper confrontation?”

Paul reminds us that we look at one another not from our own narrow perspective (Do I like him? Do I agree with her? Oh, he gets on my nerves. She bugs me.). Rather, we are called to look at one another through the waters of baptism. In the community of the

church, we look at our pilgrim companions as new creations—not looking at the old—for all have been made new through baptism. Paul adds: “All this is from God”. We are challenged to discover in the other the call and gift of God. This new perspective is possible because God has already worked, so to speak, to reconcile us with Godself and with one another. If we translate this reconciliation to life in community, it means that we as individuals are not required through our own work or ingenious methods to “form” or “build” a community. No, the community, the new creation in Christ, already exists. The challenge posed to each, and every community is discovering the presence of God already active, already acting in the lives of each member.

Being reconciled one to another is important but the first and most important step is reconciling ourselves to God. Allowing ourselves to receive God’s abundant grace. Allowing ourselves to see that we are beloved, chosen, and adored by God, that just like the younger brother no matter what we have done, God still loves us, and races to welcome us, despite what the community around us may feel. That through Christ we are a new creation. May we, as new creations, accept this gift of grace that God has given us.

### **Affirmation of Faith**

We believe in a God who waits in the driveway for us.

We believe in a God who leaves the porch light on and throws a feast when we are found.

We believe in a God who doesn’t stop looking for us when we get lost.

We believe in a God of prodigal grace—excessive, extravagant, over-the-top grace.

In response to this grace, we hold tighter to each other.

We remember that humans are not meant to go through life alone; so we look for ways to welcome each other in, to live like we are family, and to lead

with grace—excessive, extravagant, over-the-top grace.

We believe that this is our call. Let it be so. Amen.



**Hymn:**

Praise the God of grace and glory

[https://resoundworship.org/song/praise the god of grace and glory](https://resoundworship.org/song/praise-the-god-of-grace-and-glory)

**Prayers of Intercession:**

In peace let us pray to the Lord saying, Lord have mercy.

For the church throughout the world, that all Christians may embody the reconciling love of Christ, let us pray to the Lord. Lord, have mercy. For the nations of the world and its leaders, that all may dwell in peace and that justice may be tempered by mercy, let us pray to the Lord.

**Lord, have mercy.**

For the planet Earth, God's gift to humankind, that all may share wisely its resources and conserve its riches for our children's children, let us pray to the Lord.

**Lord, have mercy.**

For our enemies, that we may regard them with the reconciling love made manifest in Christ, let us pray to the Lord.

**Lord, have mercy.**

For those who are sick or in trouble, for the defenceless, the weak, and the poor, that they may be restored to wholeness of life and livelihood, let us pray to the Lord.

**Lord, have mercy.**

For the lost, for those who have abandoned God, friends, or family, and for those who have never known such love, that they may come to know the joy of love's embrace, let us pray to the Lord.

**Lord, have mercy.**

Loving God, hear the prayers of your people for the sake of our world, and our Saviour Jesus Christ, through whom we pray. Amen.

**Hymn:** God of All compassion

**Benediction:**

Wellspring of all grace,  
give us strength to grow together onto the fullness of Jesus and  
to be signs and carriers of grace to each other,

in the communion of the Spirit,  
in the fellowship of Your beloved Son,  
in whose name and power we pray.

Amen

Dr Rowan Williams, abbreviated prayer from his contribution to Rage and  
Hope

Andrew Howley

27.03.2022