

11<sup>th</sup> September 2022

Hymn TIS 449 Stand up, and bless the Lord

The minister greets the people and reads one or more of the following.

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.

And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

### Sentence

I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents. Luke 15.10

### THANKSGIVING.

Gracious God, we humbly thank you for life and health and safety,  
for freedom to work, leisure to rest, and for all that is beautiful in creation and human life.  
But, above all, we praise you for our Saviour, Jesus Christ,  
for his death and resurrection; for the gift of your Spirit; and for the hope of sharing in your glory.  
Fill our hearts with all joy and peace in believing; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

### Prayer of the Day

Undaunted you seek the lost, O God, exultant you bring home the found:  
touch our hearts with grateful wonder at the tenderness of your forbearing love;  
grant us delight in the mercy that has found us; and bring all to rejoice at the feast of forgiven sinners.  
We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God for ever and ever. Amen.

### Jeremiah 4.11-12, 4.22-28

<sup>11</sup> At that time this people and Jerusalem will be told, 'A scorching wind from the barren heights in the desert blows towards my people, but not to winnow or cleanse; <sup>12</sup> a wind too strong for that comes from me. Now I pronounce my judgments against them.' <sup>22</sup> 'My people are fools; they do not know me. They are senseless children; they have no understanding. They are skilled in doing evil; they know not how to do good.' <sup>23</sup> I looked at the earth, and it was formless and empty; and at the heavens, and their light was gone. <sup>24</sup> I looked at the mountains, and they were quaking; all the hills were swaying. <sup>25</sup> I looked, and there were no people; every bird in the sky had flown away. <sup>26</sup> I looked, and the fruitful land was a desert; all its towns lay in ruins before the Lord, before his fierce anger. <sup>27</sup> This is what the Lord says: 'The whole land will be ruined, though I will not destroy it completely. <sup>28</sup> Therefore the earth will mourn and the heavens above grow dark, because I have spoken and will not relent, I have decided and will not turn back.'

### Psalms 14

<sup>1</sup> Fools have said in their hearts 'There is no God':

they have all become vile and abominable in their doings, there is not one that does good.

<sup>2</sup> The Lord looked down from heaven upon the children of Adam:

to see if there were any who would act wisely and seek after God.

<sup>3</sup> But they have all turned out of the way, they have all alike become corrupt: there is none that does good, no not one.

<sup>4</sup> Are all the evildoers devoid of understanding:

who eat up my people as they eat bread, and do not pray to the Lord?

<sup>5</sup> They shall be struck with terror: for God is with the company of the righteous.

<sup>6</sup> Though they frustrate the poor in their hopes: surely the Lord is their refuge.

<sup>7</sup> O that deliverance for Israel might come forth from Zion:

when the Lord turns again the fortunes of his people, then shall Jacob rejoice and Israel be glad.

## 1 Timothy 1.1-2, 1.12-19a

<sup>1</sup> Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the command of God our Saviour and of Christ Jesus our hope, <sup>2</sup> To Timothy my true son in the faith: Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord. <sup>12</sup> I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has given me strength, that he considered me trustworthy, appointing me to his service. <sup>13</sup> Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief. <sup>14</sup> The grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly, along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. <sup>15</sup> Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners – of whom I am the worst. <sup>16</sup> But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his immense patience as an example for those who would believe in him and receive eternal life. <sup>17</sup> Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen. <sup>18</sup> Timothy, my son, I am giving you this command in keeping with the prophecies once made about you, so that by recalling them you may fight the battle well, <sup>19</sup> holding on to faith and a good conscience, which some have rejected and so have suffered shipwreck with regard to the faith.

## Luke 15.1-10

<sup>1</sup> Now the tax collectors and sinners were all gathering round to hear Jesus. <sup>2</sup> But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, ‘This man welcomes sinners, and eats with them.’ <sup>3</sup> Then Jesus told them this parable: <sup>4</sup> ‘Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Doesn’t he leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? <sup>5</sup> And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders <sup>6</sup> and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbours together and says, “Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.” <sup>7</sup> I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous people who do not need to repent. <sup>8</sup> ‘Or suppose a woman has ten silver coins and loses one. Doesn’t she light a lamp, sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it? <sup>9</sup> And when she finds it, she calls her friends and neighbours together and says, “Rejoice with me; I have found my lost coin.” <sup>10</sup> In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.’

Sermon

**Affirmation of Faith.**

We believe in one God, who made and loves all that is.

We believe in Jesus Christ, God’s only Son, our Lord, who was born, lived, died and rose again, and is coming to call all to account. We believe in the Holy Spirit, who calls, equips and sends out God’s people, and brings all things to their true end.

This is our faith, the faith of the Church:

We believe in one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

## CONFESSION OF SIN

‘Come now, let us reason together,’ says the Lord. ‘Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson they shall be like wool.’

Happy are those whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Isaiah 1.18

Let us now confess our sins to almighty God.

Heavenly Father,

you have loved us with an everlasting love, but we have broken your holy laws and have left undone what we ought to have done.

We are sorry for our sins and turn away from them.

For the sake of your Son who died for us, forgive us, cleanse us and change us.

By your Holy Spirit, enable us to live for you; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

God desires that none should perish, but that all should turn to Christ, and live.  
In response to his call we acknowledge our sins. God pardons those who humbly repent,  
and truly believe the gospel. Therefore we have peace with God, through Jesus Christ. **Amen**

**Christ died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. Romans 6.10–11**

Hymn TIS 659 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm

#### THE MINISTRY OF PRAYER

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done,  
on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread.  
Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial  
and deliver us from evil.  
For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and for ever. Amen.

#### THE SENDING OUT OF GOD'S PEOPLE

Loving God, we thank you for hearing our prayers,  
feeding us with your word, and encouraging us in our meeting together.

Take us and use us to love and serve you and all people,  
in the power of your Spirit and in the name of your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

hymn TIS 590 What a friend we have in Jesus

**blessing.**

May the God of peace equip you with everything good for doing his will, working in you what is pleasing to  
him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. **Amen.**



How would we feel if someone we had long despised for their way of life turned up at church and declared that they were a Christian? There might be a few questions. How much of their lifestyle would we expect them to change before we would accept them? Or would we say how marvellous and leave it to God to do what he wanted in their lives.

The pharisees were the 'good people' of their time, they worked really hard to know what the law said, what it meant and to apply it in their own lives. Just the sort of people we would welcome in our church. Their problem was that they had come to assume that God approved of them because they followed the law and they despised everyone who didn't measure up to their standards. They followed every little detail but managed to forget that God had made the Israelites a special people so that they could tell the rest of the world how much he loved them.



The Pharisees had a list of people who they considered the very lowest, tax collectors, camel drivers, sailors, gamblers dyers and shepherds. Just above them were the ordinary poor people, those who had to work hard just to survive and had no time to study the law and sometimes needed to do things that were not quite acceptable.

It is quite ironic that shepherds were considered shiftless, thieving and trespassers although the Old Testament is full of images of God as the shepherd of his people and religious leaders were supposed to be shepherds under God of their local flock. One of the reasons Jesus told the parable of the lost sheep was to remind them of this image of God as the Good shepherd.



The scandal for the Pharisees was that Jesus received such outcasts, shared table fellowship, and even played host to them. By accepting sinners and eating with them Jesus is indicating God's gracious spirit towards the very people held in contempt by the Pharisees and scribes: The celebration of the coming of the kingdom was taking place in Jesus' table fellowship with the outcasts, but because the Pharisees righteousness had become a barrier separating them from the outcasts, the Pharisees were missing it.

The whole point of the parable of the lost sheep that the only difference about this sheep is that it is lost. Imagine the impact of this on the repentant sinners who heard the stories, they didn't have to earn God's love or Jesus' respect. He loved coming looking for them and celebrated finding them. And what Jesus did - this is the deepest point of these parables and the ultimate reason why the pharisees objected to them - was what God was doing. Jesus actions on earth corresponded exactly to God's love in the heavenly realm.



The woman with a small saving or dowry, probably kept as a headdress, would search tirelessly before accepting the loss of a single coin. Her house is typical of a poor house at the time, with a dirt floor, a small door, and no window. She lights a lamp, sweeps the house and searches carefully. When she finds the coin, she rejoices and calls her female friends to celebrate with her.

In both parables, rejoicing calls for celebration. Neither sheep nor coins can repent, but the parable aims not at calling the 'sinners' to repentance but at calling the 'righteous' to join the celebration. The God who showed mercy to the renegade Israelites in the wilderness rejoices over the salvation of every lost person like a shepherd rejoices over the recovery of a lost sheep or a woman rejoices over the finding of a lost coin. The question posed by the parables is whether we will join in the celebration - to celebrate with God one must also share in God's mercy.



Jesus is not saying that such people were simply accepted as they stand, Sinners must repent, the lost sheep and the lost coin are found. But Jesus had a different idea of what 'repentance' means. For the Pharisees, nothing short of adopting their standards of purity and law-observance would do. For Jesus, when people follow him and his way, his law of love, that is true repentance. The Pharisees and legal experts themselves need to repent in that way. When Jesus says 'righteous persons who don't need to repent' he is being a little tongue-in-cheek. Anyone who sees themselves as better than others needs to repent.



A person who repents and follows Jesus does not become perfect immediately, some of the things that the church has frowned on in the last decade or two are never mentioned in the bible, but new Christians experience a lot of peer pressure to immediately confirm to the standards of 'Christianity'.

I have known lovely Christians who still smoke but feel very guilty about it and they go away and hide when they need a smoke. God has a more important agenda for these people, he wants their heart to be right much more than their lungs. When the time is right, he will work with them to give up the habit, but his plan is totally different to what we would devise. In the same way whatever external things we might notice about a new Christian it is the internal things which show their, or our, growth in the Lord. Do they love their family better, are they kinder to their neighbours, can you see the fruit of the spirit growing in their lives?



The point of the parables is clear. That is why there is a party going on: all heaven is having a party; the angels are joining in and if we don't have one as well, we'll be out of tune with God's reality.

In the stories of the sheep and the coin, the punch line in each case depends on the Jewish belief that the two halves of God's creation, heaven, and earth, were meant to fit together and be in harmony with each other. If you discover what's going on in heaven, you'll discover how things are meant to be on earth. That, after all, is the point of praying that God's kingdom will come 'on earth as in heaven'.

As far as the legal experts were concerned, the closest you could get to heaven was in the temple; the temple required strict purity from the priests; and the closest that non-priest could come to copying heaven was to maintain a similarly strict purity in aspect of life. But now Jesus was declaring that heaven was having a great noisy party every time a single sinner saw the light and began to follow god's way. If earth dwellers wanted to copy the life of heaven, they'd have a party too. That is what Jesus is doing.



Imagine the party when Paul saw the light, on the road and then a few days later, when the Lord opened his eyes. Paul had been persecuting the church, but he immediately turned his life around and followed Jesus in every way. In our reading today he is writing to Timothy his protégé to give him advice about working for the kingdom as a pastor, but he gets a little side-tracked and can't help but have his own little party as he celebrates God's mercy to him. I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has given me strength, that he considered me trustworthy, appointing me to his service. The grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly, along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. <sup>15</sup> Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.

The Pharisees tried to please God by being moral, but Jesus came into the world to save sinners. The world often sees us very like the Pharisees, they see us as 'good,' as rule keepers, they do not see us partying because a sinner was saved. The gospel is good news especially for those who find life difficult- let us share the good news without refusing anyone.



Each one of us has received God's mercy and love, through no credit of our own. We are the lost sheep, or the lost coin and our loving God came and found us and brought us home. The party continues as we bring more lost sheep into his fold.

Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen.

# Shepherd King

Transform our desire for  
power, wealth and  
approval into a longing to  
serve you and others.

Make us ever aware of  
how our lives impact those  
most in need of our  
generous service and give  
us the courage to change  
the way we live. Amen!