

27 March 2022

Hymn

Greeting

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. **And also with you.**

Sentence

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. Luke 15.21

Prayer of Preparation

Almighty God, to whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hidden: cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love you, and worthily magnify your holy name, through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Prayer of the Day

God of compassion, you are slow to anger, and full of mercy, welcoming sinners who return to you with penitent hearts: receive in your loving embrace all who come home to you, and seat them at your bountiful table, that, with all your children, they may feast with delight on all that satisfies the hungry heart.

We ask this in the name of Jesus Christ our Saviour, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. **Amen.**

THE MINISTRY OF THE WORD

Joshua 5.2-12

² At that time the Lord said to Joshua, 'Make flint knives and circumcise the Israelites again.' ³ So Joshua made flint knives and circumcised the Israelites at Gibeath Haaraloth. ⁴ Now this is why he did so: all those who came out of Egypt – all the men of military age – died in the wilderness on the way after leaving Egypt.

⁵ All the people that came out had been circumcised, but all the people born in the wilderness during the journey from Egypt had not. ⁶ The Israelites had moved about in the wilderness for forty years until all the men who were of military age when they left Egypt had died, since they had not obeyed the Lord. For the Lord had sworn to them that they would not see the land that he had solemnly promised their ancestors to give us, a land flowing with milk and honey.

⁷ So he raised up their sons in their place, and these were the ones Joshua circumcised. They were still uncircumcised because they had not been circumcised on the way. ⁸ And after the whole nation had been circumcised, they remained where they were in camp until they were healed. ⁹ Then the Lord said to Joshua, 'Today I have rolled away the reproach of Egypt from you.' So the place has been called Gilgal to this day.

¹⁰ On the evening of the fourteenth day of the month, while camped at Gilgal on the plains of Jericho, the Israelites celebrated the Passover. ¹¹ The day after the Passover, that very day, they ate some of the produce of the land: unleavened bread and roasted grain.

¹² The manna stopped the day after they ate this food from the land; there was no longer any manna for the Israelites, but that year they ate the produce of Canaan.

Hear the word of the Lord, **Thanks be to God.**

Psalm 32

¹ Blessed are those whose sin is forgiven: whose iniquity is put away.

² Blessed are those to whom the Lord imputes no blame: and in whose spirit there is no guile.

³ For whilst I held my tongue: my bones wasted away with my daily complaining.

⁴ Your hand was heavy upon me day and night: and my moisture was dried up like a drought in summer. ⁵ Then I acknowledged my sin to you: and my iniquity I did not hide;

⁶ I said 'I will confess my transgressions to the Lord': and so you forgave the wickedness of my sin. ⁷ For this cause shall everyone that is faithful make their prayer to you in the day of trouble:

and in the time of the great water-flood, it shall not come near them.

⁸ You are a place to hide me in, you will preserve me from trouble: you will surround me with deliverance on every side. ⁹ 'I will instruct you, and direct you in the way that you should go: I will fasten my eye upon you, and give you counsel.

¹⁰ 'Be not like horse or mule, that have no understanding: whose forward course must be curbed with bit and bridle.'

¹¹ Great tribulations remain for the ungodly: but whoever puts their trust in the Lord, mercy embraces them on every side.

¹² Rejoice in the Lord, you righteous, and be glad: and shout for joy, all you that are true of heart.

2 Corinthians 5.16-21

¹⁶ So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. ¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: the old has gone, the new is here! ¹⁸ All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: ¹⁹ that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. ²⁰ We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: be reconciled to God. ²¹ God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Hear the word of the Lord, **thanks be to God.**

Luke 15.11-32

¹¹ Jesus continued: 'There was a man who had two sons. ¹² The younger one said to his father, "Father, give me my share of the estate." So he divided his property between them. ¹³ 'Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living. ¹⁴ After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. ¹⁵ So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. ¹⁶ He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything. ¹⁷ 'When he came to his senses, he said, "How many of my father's hired servants have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! ¹⁸ I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. ¹⁹ I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired servants." ²⁰ So he got up and went to his father. 'But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms round him and kissed him. ²¹ 'The son said to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son." ²² 'But the father said to his servants, "Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. ²³ Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. ²⁴ For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found." So they began to celebrate. ²⁵ 'Meanwhile, the elder son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. ²⁶ So he called one of the servants and asked him what was going on. ²⁷ "Your brother has come," he replied, "and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound." ²⁸ 'The elder brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him. ²⁹ But he answered his father, "Look! All these years I've been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. ³⁰ But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!" ³¹ ' "My son," the father said, "you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. ³² But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.'"

This is the Gospel of the Lord, **praise to you Lord Jesus Christ.**

Sermon

THE CREED

Let us together affirm the faith of the Church

**We believe in one God, the Father, the almighty,
maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen.**

**We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father,
God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made,
of one being with the Father; through him all things were made.**

**For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven, was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the virgin Mary
and became truly human.**

For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate; he suffered death and was buried.

On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures; he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father.

He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead and his kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son is worshipped and glorified, who has spoken through the prophets.

We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church.

We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.

We look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.

THE PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

THE LORD'S PRAYER

Accept our prayers through Jesus Christ our Lord, who taught us to pray,

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.

PREPARATION

Jesus said: A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you. John 13.34

CONFESSION AND ABSOLUTION

Compassion and forgiveness belong to the Lord our God, though we have rebelled and wandered far off.

Let us then ask for mercy, confessing our sins in penitence and faith.

Merciful God, our maker and our judge, we have sinned against you in thought, word, and deed, and in what we have failed to do: we have not loved you with our whole heart;

we have not loved our neighbours as ourselves; we repent, and are sorry for all our sins.

Father, forgive us. Strengthen us to love and obey you in newness of life; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Absolution

Almighty God, who has promised forgiveness to all who turn to him in faith: pardon you and set you free from all your sins, strengthen you in all goodness and keep you in eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

THE GREETING OF PEACE

We are the body of Christ. **His Spirit is with us.** The peace of the Lord be always with you. **And also with you.**

Hymn

OFFERTORY

Blessed are you, Lord, God of all creation. Through your goodness we have these gifts to share.

Accept and use our offerings for your glory and for the service of your kingdom. **Blessed be God for ever.**

THE GREAT THANKSGIVING

The Lord be with you. **And also with you.**

Lift up your hearts. **We lift them to the Lord.**

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God. **It is right to give our thanks and praise.**

It is right to praise you, faithful God, always and everywhere, for with your only begotten Son and life-giving Spirit, you are the one true God from everlasting to everlasting.

At the dawn of time you wrought from nothing a universe of beauty and splendour, bringing light from darkness and order from chaos.

You formed us, male and female, in your image, and endowed us with creative power.

We turned away from you but you did not abandon us.

You called us by name and searched us out, making a covenant of mercy, giving the law, and teaching justice by the prophets. And so we praise you, joining with your faithful people of every time and place, singing the eternal song:

Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might, Heaven and earth are full of your glory.

Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest.

When the fullness of time was come, you sent your Son to be born of Mary.
Bright image of your glory, he learnt obedience to you in all things, even to death on a cross,
breaking the power of evil, freeing us from sin, and putting death to flight.
You raised him from death, exalting him to glory, and the new day dawned.
On the night he was betrayed your Son Jesus Christ shared food with his friends, his companions on the way.
While at table he took bread, blessed, and broke it, and giving it to them, said: 'Take, eat; this is my body.'
He took a cup of wine, and, giving thanks, he gave it to them, and said, 'This is my blood of the covenant,
which is poured out for many. Do this in remembrance of me.'

Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again.

Therefore, living God, as we obey his command, we remember his life of obedience to you, his suffering and death, his resurrection and exaltation, and his promise to be with us for ever.
With this bread and this cup we celebrate his saving death until he comes.

Accept, we pray, our sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving, and send your Holy Spirit upon us and our celebration that all who eat and drink at this table may be strengthened by Christ's body and blood to serve you in the world.

As one body and one holy people, may we proclaim the everlasting gospel of Jesus Christ our Lord, through whom, with whom, and in whom, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, all glory is yours, eternal God, now and for ever. **Amen.**

Blessing and honour and glory and power are yours for ever and ever. Amen.

As this broken bread was once many grains, which have been gathered together and made one bread:

so may your Church be gathered from the ends of the earth into your kingdom.

The gifts of God for the people of God.

Come let us take this holy sacrament of the body and blood of Christ in remembrance that he died for us, and feed on him in our hearts by faith with thanksgiving.

The body of our Lord Jesus Christ, which was given for you, preserve your body and soul to everlasting life. Take and eat this in remembrance that Christ died for you, and feed on him in your heart by faith with thanksgiving.

The blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, which was shed for you, preserve your body and soul to everlasting life. Drink this in remembrance that Christ's blood was shed for you, and be thankful.

THE SENDING OUT OF GOD'S PEOPLE

Bountiful God, at this table you graciously feed us with the bread of life and the cup of eternal salvation.

May we who have reached out our hands to receive this sacrament be strengthened in your service;
we who have sung your praises tell of your glory and truth in our lives; we who have seen the greatness of your love see you face to face in your kingdom and come to worship you with all your saints for ever.

Father, we offer ourselves to you as a living sacrifice through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Send us out in the power of your Spirit to live and work to your praise and glory.

Hymn

Blessing

Grant, merciful Lord, to your faithful people pardon and peace, that they may be cleansed from all their sins and serve you with a quiet mind; through Christ our Lord. and the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be among you and remain with you always. Amen.

Dismissal

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord: **In the name of Christ. Amen**



Ah, a nice passage today. This is a parable we all know really well but what do we call it?

If we call it 'the Prodigal Son', we are leaving out the second half of the parable. 'A man had two sons' focusses on the relationship to the two sons and recognises the two peaks to the story. 'The Compassionate Father and the Angry Brother' compares two ways of receiving the lost. Or you could use the slightly cumbersome title 'The Prodigal Son, the Waiting Father and the Elder Brother' which does have the advantage of recognising all the significant roles in the story but actually I think if we could ever persuade everyone to change the title 'the Compassionate Father' is the best title but truthfully I don't think we are ever going to manage to change it, so well just have to stick with the slightly inadequate title and keep talking about why its not quite adequate.



The story starts with the younger son asking for his share of the inheritance. The son virtually saying to his father, I wish you were dead added to the shame that to receive this share of the inheritance as transportable cash some of the family farm would have needed to be sold was in that culture bad knocks. The father bears both blows without recrimination.

This son progressively estranges himself from his family and his culture. He mismanages his inheritance, descends into poverty and privation. First, he collects his goods and travels to a gentile country, then he squanders everything. The famine just accelerates his impoverishment, and he must attach himself to a gentile who orders him to feed the pigs. Having to have anything to do with pigs is humiliating for a Jew, as pigs are cursed in that culture; but for him to not only feeding them but longing to eat the same food is the ultimate degradation. Carob pods were usually regarded as animal food but during famine people ate them as well. The young man had reaped the bitter fruit of his foolishness.

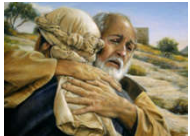


The prodigal's return begins in the mire of the pig pen. There he came to himself. He reclaims his identity. No longer deserving to be called his father son, he nevertheless resolves to leave the far country and return to his own land and to his father. He realized that he no longer had any claim on his father's goods and morally no longer has the right to be called a son but perhaps his father will allow him to be a servant in his household.

The essence of his return is that he will 'return to his father'. He has come to himself and that determines all that follows. He rehearses his speech: an address: Father; Confession: I have sinned; contrition: I am no longer worthy; and a petition: Treat me like a servant. So, he gets up and sets off for home.



No other image has come closer to describing the character of God than the waiting father, peering down the road longing for the son's return, then running to meet him. In ancient Palestine it was regarded as inappropriate, and undignified, for a grown man to run, but the father sets this aside in his joy and greets the errant son with a kiss.



The son goes into his speech but never gets to the petition because the father interrupts him: giving instructions to his servants. His lavish welcome is, of course, the point of the story: Jesus is explaining why there is something to celebrate when people turn from going their own way and begin to go God's way. The Father publicly receives the son back into his house. The lavishness of the reception is signalled by the order to bring the fatted calf, as meat is only usually served at festivals.



The elder son hears the celebration as he is coming in from working in the fields but refuses to join in. Again, we have a gap because physical separation signifies estrangement. The similarities continue as the father once again leaves the house and goes out to meet one of his sons. And this conversation is the climax of the entire parable.

The elder brother speaks first, venting his anger. Whenever the younger brother had spoken to his father, he always humbly addresses his as 'Father' but the elder brother refuses to acknowledge his relationships. He starts by saying 'listen', without acknowledging the any identification, then ironically likens his role to that of a servant (what his brother was offering to be), then he refers to his brother as 'this son of yours', lists his grievances and refuses to join the celebration.



The older brother shows, in his bad temper that he has no more respect for his father than his brother had had. He lectures him in front of his guests and refuses his pleas to come in. The father is just as gracious to this son as he was to the younger, he reminds him of their fellowship and working relationship over many years plus his relationship to his brother echoing 'son of yours' with 'brother of yours'.

If repentance for the prodigal son means learning to say 'Father' again, then for the elder son it means learning to say 'brother' again.

Just as the older son says 'I have never disobeyed your orders' so Jesus' opponents the Pharisees had boasted, but moral superiority melts like snow before the sunshine of God's love.

The elder brother represents all of us who think we can make it on our own, all of us who might be proud of the kinds of lives we live.



Here is the contrast between those who would live by merit and those who must ask for grace. The parable shows that those who would live by merit can never know the joy of grace. We cannot share in the father's grace if we demand that he deal with us according to what we deserve. Sharing in God's grace requires that we join in the celebration when others are recipients of that grace also. Part of the fellowship with Christ is receiving and rejoicing with others who do not deserve our forgiveness or God's grace. Each person is of such value to God, however that none is excluded from God's grace. Neither should we withhold our forgiveness.

The parable leaves us with a question of whether the elder brother joined the celebration. Did he go in and welcome his brother home, or did he stay outside pouting and feeling wronged. We are supposed to think this through for



ourselves. Where do we fit in this story? Which role in the story do we and this church fit most naturally. How can we move towards becoming people through whom people can learn of God's grace? How can we celebrate the party of God's love in such a way as to welcome not only the younger brothers who have come back from the dead, but also the older brothers who thought there was nothing wrong with them? The parable ends there because that is the decision each of us must make. If we go in, we accept grace as the father's rule of life.



This parable is such a vivid picture of how gracious our God is to all of us: from the moment when he generously gives the younger son what he wanted, through to the wonderful homecoming welcome, to his patient understanding of the older son, we have a vivid picture as anywhere in teaching what God's love is like and of what Jesus himself took as the model for his own ministry of welcome to the outsider and sinners.

No matter who you are in this parable, the father loves you and simply wants you to join him in the celebration and the family business. The family business is always wanting to welcome more prodigal and more self-righteous siblings into the family and celebrate each and every one then teach them how to follow our brother Jesus and love all the people that they love.