

LENT 4

27/3/22

CAVES BEACH

CALL TO WORSHIP

God is with us this morning!

Calling us to friendship, calling us to praise.

God is with us this morning!

Calling us to listen, calling us to respond.

God is with us this morning!

Calling us to confess, calling us to forgive.

God is with us this morning!

Calling us to celebration, calling us to follow Jesus.

Opening Prayer

A love that will not let us go,

**You have declared the height, breadth, and depth of your
love in Jesus Christ:**

A love that searches out the lost and rejected,

A love that brings wholeness and healing,

A love that is not satisfied with half-truths or evasion,

A love that confronts evil, confronts injustice head on,

A love that accepts the despised and unlovely,

**A love that stayed faithful to you, O most loving God, all
the way to the Cross. Amen.**

HYMN 233 I will sing the wonderous story

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nAcpYr9I6Tk&t=16s>

PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING & CONFESSION

Give thanks to our gracious God, for we are a restored and reconciled people,

the old things that have left us shabby, worn and faded have been restored and we are like a new creation. We are no longer judged by what has knocked us about and the wrongs we have done, we are seen in a new light, light that shines on us through the loving friendship of Christ, a friend that is willing to go to the wire to bring us back into right relationship with God and others.

And so, with gratitude we become representatives of the light, people with the purpose of reconciling all things in all creation together for good.

God of compassion we come to you with open and honest hearts as we think about how we are negotiating what's splendid and what's difficult in our lives.

We get things right, then we get things wrong and that's okay, but not admitting to our wrongdoing can dry out our souls and create a heartlessness that is damaging to ourselves and those around us. It can lead to callousness when considering how to react to the poor and the excluded, to creating silos of us and them, and easily placing people in the throw away basket.

Help us become better than this.

We skip along merrily and then we misstep, we misspeak, and we mishear, and this is ok, as long as we don't pretend our missteps are someone else's fault. Trying to weasel our way out of a situation of our own making by diverting blame is an act that lacks integrity.

Help us become better than this.

Make us clear-sighted enough to see when we have made mistakes, make us brave enough to accept when we have behaved badly, and make us willing to set things right.

WORDS OF ASSURANCE

Hear once again these words from Frederick Buechner – *we are saved by grace. There's nothing **we** have to do. There's nothing we **have** to do.*

There's nothing we have to do. This is God's promise to us and we can rely on it.

READINGS

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

¹⁶ 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. ¹⁷ So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! ¹⁸ All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; ¹⁹ 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. ²⁰ 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. ²¹ For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

- **Luke 15:1-3, 11b-32**

Now all the tax collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to him. 2 And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, "This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them."

3 So he told them this parable:

¹¹ Then Jesus said, "There was a man who had two sons. ¹² The younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of the property that will belong to me.' So he divided his property between them. ¹³ A few days later the younger son gathered all he had and travelled to a distant country, and there he squandered his property in dissolute living. ¹⁴ When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that country, and he began to be in need. ¹⁵ So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs. ¹⁶ He would gladly have filled himself with the pods that the pigs were eating; and no one gave him anything. ¹⁷ But when he came to himself he said, 'How many of my father's hired hands have bread enough and to spare, but here I am dying of hunger! ¹⁸ I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; ¹⁹ I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands.'" ²⁰ So he set off and went to his father. But 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. ²¹ Then the son said to him, 'Father, I have

sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’²² But the father said to his slaves, ‘Quickly, bring out a robe—the best one—and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet.’²³ And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; ²⁴ for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!’ And they began to celebrate.

²⁵ “Now his elder son was in the field; and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing.²⁶ He called one of the slaves and asked what was going on.²⁷ He replied, ‘Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has got him back safe and sound.’²⁸ Then he became angry and refused to go in. His father came out and began to plead with him.²⁹ But he answered his father, ‘Listen! For all these years I have been working like a slave for you, and I have never disobeyed your command; yet you have never given me even a young goat so that I might celebrate with my friends.’³⁰ But when this son of yours came back, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fatted calf for him!’³¹ Then the father^[d] said to him, ‘Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours.’³² But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found.”

HYMN 459 In Christ there is no east or west

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TpITJOShix0&t=19s>

SERMON

How many times have you heard this parable?

One of the tough issues we have as followers of Jesus is that we sometimes might wonder if God takes us for granted. No matter how hard we work and how earnest our efforts are nothing changes. There are seemingly wonderful blessings being received by other people while we wonder whether we really are getting our fair share?

Why do we feel like that?

Along with the parable of the God Samaritan, the parable of the Prodigal Son is perhaps one of the two best known parables. At the same time, it is in many ways one of the more complex parables as there are several points of learning within the story. I would go so far as to suggest that there are several stories within this parable and that each has a different main character which can relate to us at different times in our life.

For instance, if you were the parent of a runaway child you would relate to the father sitting and waiting to see their child returning.

There are several different titles which could be given to this passage such as: The Waiting Father, Prodigal Son, the Older Brother.

Perhaps the reason that we all know this story as the Prodigal Son is that it has been used so frequently as a preaching tool so that we are drawn to the image of the son who runs away and, after making a mess of things, needs a place where he will be safe and secure as well as being loved and supported.

There is nothing wrong with the story in this respect and it is very comforting to hear that there is hope in life for all of us. We will never tire of hearing that God wants us to be close to Him. It is comforting that God will come running to us with open arms and a celebratory party when we do eventually come home. Picking up on what Paul says this morning we are made righteous with God.

It is probably true that Jesus may well have told this story many times during His ministry. At the same time it might surprise us to recall that this parable only occurs in Luke's Gospel. When we really look at the totality of the whole passage the emphasis to me seems to finally settle firmly on the angry older brother!

If we remember back to our Sunday School days the story told to us so often passed over the outburst of the old brother. However if we look at the context of the whole passage and those around it we can see that it was a direct shot at the offence being taken by the pious religious types who were attacking Jesus for the people he was mixing with. They thought that Jesus should be keeping clear of 'tax collectors and other outcasts.'

The last things that the religious types wanted to hear were stories about their need to accept Jesus' insights and change their attitudes. The religious types thought that Jesus' behaviour and the company he kept clearly showed that He had no religious creditability. This parable is a real 'slap in the face' to their approach.

If we think back to this week's Gospel readings and include the passages omitted by the lectionary we can see that there are three parables. The first two are very similar to one another. In response to the jibes of the onlookers Jesus tells of the shepherd who loses a sheep and throws a party when it is found. Here Jesus says that heaven rejoices over one sinner who turns to God.

Then we come to the story of the woman who searches for and finds a lost coin. When she finds the coin she is so pleased that she has a party with her friends. Once again Jesus tells us that heaven rejoices over each sinner who returns to God.

Now we come to the third passage in this trilogy. This time the emphasis changes as we are actually dealing with a person who has dug themselves into a complete mess. There is one main similarity with the others in that the father is overjoyed when the lost item is found. This time there is a party with a fatted calf killed and guests invited to celebrate.

Here comes the crux of Jesus parable. The passage does not stop with the party like the other stories. There is a hiccup in this story here when the older brother gets involved.

One of the techniques often used by story tellers is known as 'broken repetition.' We all know the process where a story is built up through repetition until the punch-line comes out with something completely out of 'left-field.'

So, we have one story about a sheep, the next about a coin, and then in the third one there is a disruption to the celebration as the older brother chucks the proverbial 'wobbly fit.'

Here we can see a message being thrown right at us. Jesus is not simply telling us that heaven celebrates the return of every lost soul. Jesus is contrasting that with the response of those from within God's family. The emphasis is not so much on the Prodigal son, but the reaction of the older brother. The parable now turns into the Loving Father and the Angry Brother. It is a very pointed jibe against the scribes and pharisees who are attacking Jesus for mixing with sinners. If we recall back to the start of the Gospel reading these are the very people attacking Jesus actions.

They are a group of angry older brothers all bound up in their religious beliefs which exclude those who have different views.

"All these years I've been working like a slave for you, I've never disobeyed you even once, and yet you've never even given me a young goat so I can party with my friends. And yet when this low life son of yours, who took off with all the money you gave him and blew it in casinos and brothels, comes home, you crack open the best wines and fatted calf for him!"

Initially we might like to think that perhaps we could have some sympathy for the older son's disgruntled attitude. You have been faithfully attending

church for all these years and you strive to do the right thing all the time. There are those people who blew all their money on pokies and grog and wild parties. I have always been an active member of my local church. I have been faithful to my marriage vows. I have turned the other cheek. I have kept up my daily prayers.

And then you walk into this house following Jesus and he has all the celebratory wild people and the people who I think have been doing the wrong things sitting with Him.

Where is the reward for all of my good works?

Why are these people even in His presence?

Yes!, we can relate to the older brother?

As we do this we misunderstand Jesus' message. "My son, you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. Everything."

Perhaps the father figure could have also said: *"What do you mean, I never gave you a goat for a party? Listen son, they're your animals. If you never got a calf for a party with your mates it's because you're a miserable sod and you're too stupid and too stingy to invite them around. So we killed the fatted calf for him. Well we'll fatten another one just for you. Everything here is yours, but you're such a whinging miser you don't even know how to enjoy life anymore!"*

In fact God is much gentler than this with us. We keep forgetting that we are the ones who have not missed out of God's love. We already have the jackpot! However if we spend our lives like accountants counting favours and worrying that someone else might not deserve credit as much as we do, we have missed the whole point. We can never enjoy God's grace while we are like misers unwilling to share in the bounty.

What comes out very clearly from this passage is that God does not add up our time sheets and is not worried if someone is overpaid in comparison to me. That attitude is for accountants, not for Christians who live under grace.

And when you're in the business of reconciliation it doesn't much matter what time the last person gets in, when they do it's party time every time. The father in the story didn't throw the party because he liked the younger son better than the older son. He threw the party because what he wanted most of all was both his sons and finally he's got them both again. Unless, that is, we storm off in a huff and break his heart all over again.

If you spend your life turning up your nose at God's grace because you're not given the seat of honour in recognition of all the hard work you've done, it will only be yourself that you are hurting.

"Everything I own is yours." God's grace is all yours. It's lavished on everyone who will receive it. The only way to miss out is to refuse your seat at the table. One son nearly missed out because he ran so far from the table he nearly didn't find his way back. The other may yet miss out if he refuses to sit at table with the first. Our God, and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, will not be able to give himself over entirely to rejoicing and celebrating until both – until all – are seated at the table.

HYMN 533 I come with joy

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s7WGMkU91YM>

PRAYERS FOR THE OFFERING

We give these gifts without conditions attached trusting that they will do good in whatever place they land. Amen.

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

Good morning everyone,

Before I start the prayers. It is with great sadness that after almost 12 happy years living here in Caves Beach Neville and I will be moving in with Neville Father's in Eastwood (Sydney) In the next month or so. Reason being Neville has had to retire because of ongoing pain and discomfort due to a workplace injury which occurred June last year. So we won't be able to afford to keep renting. In the meantime his Dad is almost 98 years old and is at present in hospital for at least another 4 weeks because of a broken shoulder. We realise his Dad is not looking after himself as he used to. So we have had to make this difficult life changing decision. We will be visiting Caves Beach frequently for our medical appointments etc. As we would like to come back here and live in the area again when our circumstances change. Because we love it here and for me personally I have found and got to know our Lord and Saviour, Christ Jesus. It has been an amazing journey. I feel the Lord is closing this door for now and is taking us where He needs us to be in the foreseeable future. I'm looking at it as an adventure. Thank you everyone. Our love to you all.

Let us pray,

God of the past, the present and the future, we thank you that you love us faithfully and uniquely. You loved us before we knew anything about you; you care for us in every moment of our lives; you know our deepest thoughts, our highest hopes and our greatest fears; you know the best and worst in us, and still you love us. Thank you that you never let us go.

Thank you for the plans and promises you have made for us, which give us hope for today and tomorrow. God of our past, our present and our future, receive our thanks and praise which we offer in Jesus's name. Amen.

Heavenly Father, hear our prayers for our brothers and sisters in Ukraine.

Lord, we ask for peace for those who need peace, reconciliation for those who need reconciliation and comfort for all who don't know what tomorrow will bring. Lord may your Kingdom come, and Your will be done.

Lord God, we ask for you to be with all especially the children who are suffering as the crisis in Ukraine deteriorates. Lord for those who are anxious and fearful. For those who are bereaved, injured or have lost their lives. And for those who have lost loved ones. Lord hear our prayers.

A prayer for those impacted by the floods: God of healing and mercy, we come before you with our hearts filled with grief as we see the devastation. We pray that your presence would be felt by those who are grieving, who are injured, and who have lost their homes and livelihoods. We pray for wisdom and safety for those who are responding to the people in need and the many challenges left in the wake of the event. We pray for our churches, that they be witnesses to your compassion and care for all who suffer. God, you are our refuge and strength, an ever present help in times of trouble. For this we give you thanks and ask that you hear our prayers for the people of New South Wales and South East Queensland. Amen.

We pray for all our congregational brothers and sisters in Christ, whom are waiting for or are recovering from surgeries. And a special thank you for the healing and recovery of our minister Mark Watt. Lord, we lift them all up into your loving arms so they know and feel comfort from your great unfailing love, which endures forever and never lets us down. Lord, may you strengthen us to trust you more. In His precious name of Your beloved Son, Christ Jesus. Amen.

From 2 Thessalonians 3:16. May the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times and in every way. The Lord be with all of you. Amen.

Please join me in the Lord's 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.

HYMN 209 And can it be

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JiSAjwtpFUc&t=14s>

BENEDICTION

Go into the day knowing that the grace of God goes with you travelling with you like your shadow – there is nothing you have to do - it is always there.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-u-WxpmOpN4>