

Welcome, Announcements, and Land Acknowledgement

➤ *O let the power fall on me*

Call to Worship – responsive

When we stumble and our faith falters,

God's faithfulness bears us along.

When our spirits soar and our faith grows strong,

God's faithfulness raises us up.

When our fears and concerns distract us,

God is still faithful and goes ahead of us.

God's faithfulness endures forever!

We lift our hearts in praise to our God today and always!

➤ *Song. 341. Before the World Began*

Gathering Prayer / The Lord's Prayer / Words of Hope

Loving God, whose ear is always ready to listen, who laughs with us and cries with us, who feeds us good things, and who guides us in the way we should go, heaven and earth are filled with your glory and resplendent with your Holy fingerprints. We come to worship you this morning, with our prayers, our singing, our thoughts, words and actions. Come and be present with us and show us how to be the disciples you would have us be. Jesus, look into our hearts and help us to see those things that you want to change, to heal, to strengthen and to nourish.

Forgive our inability to love ourselves, and to remember that you made us in your image with your holy hands of love. Forgive our grudges or when we have settled for bitterness. Forgive our fears and anxieties when we have forgotten that you are faithful in all things. Send your Holy Spirit to remake and renew us, so that we can serve you, love you and walk in your paths with trust and joy. We pray this in the name of Jesus Christ, who taught his friends to pray... ***Our Father, who art in heaven – hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come – thy will be done – on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen***

Our God says to us: *Do not remember the former things or consider the things of old. I am about to do a new thing! I am the One who blots out your transgressions for my own sake and I will not remember your sins.* (Isaiah 43) Praise be to God who accepts and uses our very human lives in the unfolding story of redemption and new life. Hear the good news! We are a forgiven and resurrection people. Thanks be to God. Amen

So he told them this parable:

Which one of you, having a hundred sheep and losing one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the one that is lost until he finds it? When he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders and rejoices. And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbors, saying to them, "Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost."

Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.

Or what woman having ten silver coins, if she loses one of them, does not light a lamp, sweep the house, and search carefully until she finds it? When she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, "Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost."

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

Then Jesus said, "There was a man who had two sons. 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.

A few days later the younger son gathered all he had and traveled to a distant country, and there he squandered his property in dissolute living. When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that country, and he began to be in need. 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. He would gladly have filled himself with the pods that the pigs were eating; and no one gave him anything. 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! I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands.'"

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. 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."

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. And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!" And they began to celebrate.

Now his elder son was in the field; and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. He called one of the slaves and asked what was going on.

He replied, "Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has got him back safe and sound."

Then he became angry and refused to go in. His father came out and began to plead with him. 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. But when this son of yours came back, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fatted calf for him!"

Then the father said to him, "Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. 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."

This is the word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

Message ***The Prodigal***

Rev. Cathy Victor (With thanks to Robert Farrar Capon)

Creating God, who transforms dissonance into melody; who holds tension and eases it into harmony. Tune our hearts to your grace, that we may hear the resounding melody of your love. Amen

He wasn't what you'd call popular. In fact, he was often the object of ridicule and derision- or at least of laughter. He kind of had friends, but it was debatable whether they could be counted on when push came to shove. If you looked up the word loser, you'd probably see his picture. Charlie Brown always had a rough go of it. He never received valentines. His kite was always getting stuck in some tree. The Christmas tree he chose made everyone cringe and laugh. And when he'd worked up enough trust to have a run at kicking the football - again - well, you know what would happen. Lucy would always yank it away and he'd go flying instead. He sometimes said, "My anxieties have anxieties." Poor Charlie Brown. What a loser.

The gospel of Luke has a lot of losers in it and today is no exception. Glancing back at the previous chapter, we see a group of stories all about dinner parties. In a sense they set the scene. Jesus had gone to a banquet - a dinner party at the home of one of the Pharisees. It was the Sabbath, and Jesus heals a man with dropsy/edema (swelling in the legs, arms). It doesn't go over well. What rotten timing Jesus. Healing on the Sabbath? It messes with ideas of the law, of conformity, politeness. Couldn't you have just waited a few hours to tend to that loser?

A conversation ensues... Who should you invite to the party, your dinner party? Jesus tells them when they have a party to invite the poor, the crippled, the lame and the blind. Then you will be blessed, because they cannot return the gift. It's not about praise, being the best, the most, sitting at the head of the table. Humble yourself, take the lowest seat. In Greek the word for lowest refers to death; the lowest state, which is the condition for resurrection. It's about the least, the lost and the loser. This is a clue to understanding today's scripture.

And so while the Pharisees are grumbling about Jesus' ideas, he tells them the story we heard today about the father and his two sons.

The youngest son basically tells his dad to just drop dead so that he can have his fair share of the inheritance. Quite a plan. And the father complies, at least legally - giving the older son the farm and the younger son his share of the money. And the younger son heads off to spend his money in lavish, wasteful and extravagant ways, which is what being a prodigal means. The term prodigal has come to mean the return of someone who is wayward, but it's actually all about extravagance.

The younger son eventually runs out of money and finds himself reduced to feeding pigs in the muck and the mire. In this unclean and repulsive situation, he is basically dead, and so - time to make a new plan in order to get what he wants. He still doesn't really get it. He mulls over what to say to his dad as he heads home. "Let's make a deal!" I'll tell you what, dad, I'll just be your servant and I promise to make up for what I did. But his dad isn't about bookkeeping. He doesn't keep a ledger of deeds.

Jesus is saying salvation; redemption is not found in our successes but is somehow hidden there in our lost lives and in the situations of death. We usually prefer to be the first, the found, the important one with the gold star and blue ribbon. But God has 'pensioned off the bookkeeping department permanently.' No more ledgers for the nice or the nasty, the winners, or losers. That way of doing business is over. We don't have to worry about an audit of our personal books of behavioural records. That has all been nailed to the cross. Jesus was not sent to judge the world but to save it. We are not called to make it in the Guinness Book of Spiritual Records. (R.F. Capon)

It doesn't matter if we drive Teslas or shopping carts. Grace is not tit for tat. It is not earned. Neither is confession some kind of transaction or negotiation of actions to secure forgiveness. It's all been done. Finished. And so the younger prodigal is working on his plan and his father sees him off in the distance. The father runs to him and throws his arms around him. He yells out that it is time for a party. It's time to celebrate! Bring out the robe! The Ring! Prepare the food and pour the wine!

The father's response isn't a tentative, - well- ok, come on in. You're forgiven but let's not have any more of that nonsense. The father - and God - is a prodigal too. Lavish, extravagant, generous and filled with unending grace.

Meanwhile, the older son is standing nearby watching aghast as this travesty unfolds as he sulks with disgust and resentment, refusing to go inside. This son, also known as the representative of the faculty of law, stomps his feet saying, what about me? I've always been the good boy.

The father responds - you're in charge now, not me. You haven't wasted or shared a thing, so stop complaining. Your brother was as good as dead, but he's alive again!

Robert Farran Capon continues with this conversation: *"Why can't you see? You own this place, Morris. And the only reason you're not enjoying it is because you refuse to be dead to your dumb rules. So do us a favour. Drop dead. Shut up. Pour yourself a drink. Put on a funny hat and step inside."* Join the party, Morris!

Death comes before resurrection. It's not a magic trick. It's that love is stronger than death and grace is stronger than sin. Luke is saying that death is the instrument of salvation. And grace is for losers.

By Jesus' death, all the garbage of our lives - the accumulation of failings, losses, hate likes, mistakes and carried resentments - are all carted off and forgiven. In Revelation 21, God tells us; "See! I am making all things new."

Over the last couple of years our world has faced a global pandemic. It has brought changes to how we all live. We keep our distances, wear face masks, have less personal contact and face to face interactions. We shop online :-). Churches have found new ways to worship - with on line streaming, putting services on YouTube and so on. Congregations all over have been changed in amazing ways that we might not have imagined before. But this isn't really new to the church. Over the long history of the church there have been myriads of ways found to worship and BE the church. From worshipping in secret in homes to majestic gothic cathedrals.

Changes keep happening. Some have even gone so far as to say the church is dying. It might interest you to know that there are people writing books and papers on the changes that we are experiencing. The church has always faced rejection, loss, brokenness. But we need not be afraid.

This week, our beloved Queen Elizabeth died. We will see many things change with King Charles III about to ascend the throne. They may not be big things, but they will be there. There is always death and change. Today we will have a picnic together with some of our sister churches. And later this week there will be the beginning of conversations among the leaders, elders and ministers of these congregations. We are trying to find our way in a time of change. Even if we find ourselves feeling like losers, there is good news! Grace is for losers!

Hear some further words of Robert Capon: *"Grace doesn't sell; you can hardly even give it away, because it works only for losers, and no one wants to stand in their line. The world of winners will buy case lots of moral advice, grosses of guilt edges prohibitions, skids of self-improvement techniques, and whole truckloads of transcendental hot air. But it will not buy free forgiveness because that threatens to let the riffraff into the supper of the Lamb."*

God's love and grace are prodigal. God's love and grace is vaster than we can imagine, and brings new life and resurrection for us all. So let's put on a funny hat, and go in and enjoy the party! Thanks be to God. Amen

➤ *song. 641 One More Step Along the World I Go*

† Offering Invitation

Let us respond in love - with joy and praise of our God, as we present our offerings.

➤ *Praise God from whom all blessings flow 306*

† Offering Prayer – unison

Creating God, we rejoice in your mercy and your goodness to us. Teach us to love with an expanding heart. We praise you for your presence with us in all things. Receive these signs of our thankfulness and our love, that they may become gifts of your grace and love to others. Use these offerings to bring your glory and to magnify your Holy name for we ask this in the name of your dear son, Jesus the Christ. Amen

† Pastoral Prayers

God of grace and new life, we rejoice in your unfathomable love and give thanks that you go before us, leading the way. We praise you for your resurrecting power at work in our lives and in our churches. Today as many of us gather together to share food, and laughter and ideas, may your presence be woven into each conversation.

Oh, God, turn your Spirit loose, to inspire and bring hope. Jesus, you intercede for us and know our needs better than we can speak or imagine. Trusting in your great mercy and love we bring you our cares and concerns.

Our world seems to be in ruins, with wars and floods, fires and fear. May your healing balm be poured out where there is pain, sorrow or fear. We pray for the people in the Saskatchewan James Smith Cree nation, reeling from so many lives taken in violence. We pray for those whose lives have been ripped apart by the war in Ukraine. We pray for peace. We pray for those who are facing illness or death – For those who are grieving – For those who are anxious and afraid – For families in distress and all who are discouraged or broken.

Oh Holy One, turn your Spirit loose, to heal the aches, mend the wounds, and to anoint your children with your healing balm of hope. May your cosmic resurrection power flood through all the lives we bring before you... and the situations that weigh on our hearts...

As your church in this city we share times of uncertainty. O Holy One, turn your Spirit loose, and the people of this congregation with it, to delight in loving your people, in the midst of our shared fragility and times of uncertainty. May your blessing rest upon us all. May you walk alongside us and go before us showing us the way. in Jesus' name. Amen

➤ *song. 422 Sing a New Song*

Blessing

Beloved, go! Go out into the world, ready to fulfill your calling as servants of Christ. God chooses you for unexpected outpourings of grace! Go in peace, filled with hope and confidence. And may the love of our God – Creator, Christ and Spirit – be with you this day and always. Amen

➤ *May the God of hope go with us every day 726*