

## 30 March 2025 – Lent 4

Welcome, Announcements, and Land Acknowledgement [Anne Krauss](#) (worship elder)

**As we come to worship in Jesus' name we acknowledge with gratitude and respect the Lkwungen people – the Songhees, Esquimalt and WSÁNEĆ – on whose traditional and unceded territory we gather. We recommit ourselves to just and respectful relationships within our congregation and our neighborhood.**

➤ *Lord, prepare me to be a sanctuary (repeat)*

Call to Worship – Lenten Liturgy

Like the prodigal son, we sometimes waste our lives

**running toward arrogant and unthinking excess.**

Like the older brother, we sometimes lose our way

**resenting the blessings others receive.**

But to all, Christ offers grace – a new creation and a reconciled world,

**so let us be glad and rejoice in the steadfast love of the Lord.**

† Psalm 32 with Refrain II / Responsive Prayer of Confession

➤ *You are my strong salvation, Lord; your love surrounds me.*

Blessed are those whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed are those whom the LORD does not hold guilty, and in whose spirit there is no deceit.

➤ *You are my strong salvation, Lord; your love surrounds me.*

While I kept silence, my body wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer. Then I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not hide my iniquity; I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD," and you forgave the guilt of my sin.

➤ *You are my strong salvation, Lord; your love surrounds me.*

Therefore, let all who are faithful offer prayer to you; at a time of distress, the rush of mighty waters shall not reach them. You are a hiding place for me; you preserve me from trouble; you surround me with glad cries of deliverance.

➤ *You are my strong salvation, Lord; your love surrounds me.*

I will instruct you and teach you the way you should go; I will counsel you with my eye upon you. Do not be like a horse or a mule, without understanding, whose temper must be curbed with bit and bridle, else it will not stay near you.

Many are the torments of the wicked, but steadfast love surrounds those who trust in the LORD. Be glad in the LORD and rejoice, O righteous; shout for joy, all you upright in heart.

➤ *You are my strong salvation, Lord; your love surrounds me.*

Gracious God, we confess those times when we have not been welcoming – when we have not opened doors, or have slammed a door on others, closing the opportunity for reconciliation.

**Loving Lord, we confess the things we have done that have made it difficult for others to enter into your love, to experience your grace and forgiveness, to feel a part of Christian community.**

Almighty God, we confess those occasions when we have been jealous of others, especially when it seems they were receiving special treatment, and we were not.

**Eternal Father, we confess those times when we have been stubborn, unwilling to bend, closed to new ideas, new dreams, new possibilities. In this time of open and honest silence, Lord, we submit to you – offering these and all our regrets...**

In your mercy O God, hear our prayer and forgive us we ask in the name of Jesus, the Christ who shows us the way of prayer...

➤ *You are my strong salvation, Lord; your love surrounds me.*

➤ *You are my strong salvation, Lord; your love surrounds me.*

### PWS&D Sharing **Creating an Environment for Success**

Any instance of violence, whether in public spaces or in the home, is one too many. PWS&D's partner in Nicaragua is helping to create safe environments that foster equitable, non-violent relationships within the family and community. The project works to protect children and adolescents, especially girls, who might be at risk, promote their rights, and strengthen and improve family dynamics.

One 13-year-old girl, who joined the project with her mother, reflects on what has changed. *"I've learned a lot, and I see things differently. At home I can talk more, and my mom tries to help me. I feel like we have changed a lot, and I feel safer. I know that I want to continue studying and learning and improving and I'm motivated to do it. I think I can do a lot of good and beautiful things – to help my family, and in the future, to help other girls like me."*

Give thanks that during this Lenten season, and throughout the year, we have opportunities to faithfully respond to Christ's call to help build safe environments where families and communities can thrive.

✠ Prayer for Understanding **Amanda Chaval**

**Thank you, O God, for forgiving us and welcoming us as your beloved children. Expand our hearts and minds this morning, that we might hear your Word. As divine wisdom reaches and changes us, we pray that we would become agents of your reconciliation with whomever we meet and wherever we are. Amen**

Scripture

**Joshua 5:9-12** [OT 197]

The LORD said to Joshua, *"Today I have rolled away from you the disgrace of Egypt."* And so that place is called Gilgal to this day.

While the Israelites were camped in Gilgal they kept the passover in the evening on the fourteenth day of the month in the plains of Jericho. On the day after the passover, on that very day, they ate the produce of the land, unleavened cakes and parched grain. The manna ceased on the day they ate the produce of the land, and the Israelites no longer had manna; they ate the crops of the land of Canaan that year.

**2 Corinthians 5:16-21** [NT 181]

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.

**Luke 15:1-3, 11b-32** [NT 78]

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

So he told them this parable:

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

There are stories in the Bible so well known they have become trite – stories that we think we can just give the opening words of or provide a descriptive title for and nothing else needs to be said... *The Good Samaritan – the Widow's Mite – the Prodigal Son*

Stories so familiar that there is a worry that nothing new or interesting is left to say – so familiar that we run the risk of failing to listen – the way we stop listening to a stale joke or the news story on repeat or a chronic complainer. We think we already know the punch line – already know what it means – so we rob ourselves of the opportunity for the Holy Spirit to teach us.

Virtually everyone knows the story of the prodigal, existentially if not biblically. We all know a family – or are a part of a family – where someone has gone astray through addiction, incarceration, mental illness, or alienation. We all know the “black sheep” of the family, whose relatives speak of them in whispers and with a sense of judgment. We know the embarrassment some feel about a sibling or child who has gone astray. There's a mixture of feelings – anger, hopelessness, worry, and denial. And, for most healthy dysfunctional families (and all families are imperfect!), there is still love and the hope of reconciliation and healing. This is true now and was true in Jesus' time.

Whole nations can create scapegoats and prodigals. We can project our guilt and failure on undocumented residents, transgender athletes, drag queens, and political opponents. What is needed instead is a sense of confession, a recognition of our limitations ethically and relationally, as a prelude for embracing our common humanity.

Today's text is a familiar story – not an Aesop's fable with a clear and predictable moral but a story replete with characters that we can identify with and messages that both convict and inspire. This is a story of love and grace and repentance – a story of foolishness and excess and pettiness – a story of a man who had two sons – a story about a father who comes out – a parent who rushes to welcome – this is the parable of an extravagant God.

Actually, we have three yoked stories of lost-and-found – we skipped over the two short ones about the lost sheep and the lost coin and went from the description of the setting where Jesus is eating with tax collectors and sinners to this parable that is about a man who had two sons. In each of these stories Jesus sets out to show that God is nothing like people may have imagined. God is not harsh and distant – not a fierce and holy deity for whom justice is more important than mercy. Jesus told the lost parables – the parable of the prodigal – in response to an angry and judgmental audience that knew who was

in and who was out – confident that they were in. Jesus is hammering home a central point – a point so vital that he tells not one story but three. All three stories end the same way: with rejoicing – a far cry from the dour disdain of the Pharisees – defenders of orthodoxy, but one that was shallow and hollow, seeing other people as abstractions and slogans rather than as kin, standing like themselves in need of prayer.

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

This fellow, Jesus, is eating with the wrong sort of people yet again. The significance of this may have been lost to us over time and we may fail to recognize just how radical this fellow, Jesus, is. Tax collectors and sinners are not just friendly folk who have been misunderstood. Publicans had taken jobs with the foreign government occupying Israel and made good money collecting taxes from their own people – collaborators with the enemy if you will. Sinners were so named because their offenses had gotten them thrown out of the synagogues – people who were excommunicated – left outside the doors of the community. The fact that Jesus eats with them is shocking – clear evidence of his acceptance of them.

The Pharisees are not truly villains either. They are the guardians of law and high standards of behaviour – sometimes we take on that role ourselves. They sense the erosive force in not distinguishing between good people and bad people – what we might refer to as "the slippery slope". After all, doesn't forgiving look very much like condoning? Are they wrong to question what Jesus is doing? Wouldn't we do the same? Don't we?

Perhaps you have felt like the younger son – eager to get away – humiliated by your mistakes – willing to do almost anything to get back to your old life. In his debauchery and destructiveness, the younger son hears the call of home. He has squandered everything, lost his spirit and place in society – has nothing to offer. He's "old" despite his youth – worn out, torn up, and devalued, even to himself. He's lost all self-esteem, and has nothing to offer, even to his parents – doubts they even love him anymore.

Maybe you feel more like the older brother – hardworking, diligent, and then resentful at the undeserved gain or unpunished wastefulness of another. He bears the burden of goodness – feeling like he needs to deliver – not make any mistakes – having the family honour resting on his shoulders. Goodness is its own prison, especially if you depend on your own goodness. There is no grace in goodness that must earn its status. So, he is lost too. Lost in alienation, he stands outside the party. There was always a celebration waiting for him, but he was too busy being the good child to accept it.

And then there is the father – desperate for a sign of a long-missed loved one – overjoyed by his or her unexpected return. Think of the extent to which parents will go to welcome a wayward child back home. Although the child in the parable falls off the grid, his parents continue to look for him. Perhaps they hired private detectives or sent out employees or reached out to the local authorities. They may have followed his every step, incognito, and grieved his choices every day. They may have prepared for a homecoming every day, hoping for the one day he'd show up and they could restore him to the family.

That's God! God never gives up, never abandons, never condemns. There may be a "hell" but maybe it's of our own making and God's hand reaches into that hell to rescue the lost.

With which character do you identify? Pick a favourite and think about how you might retell the story from that person's point of view – remember this is a story so you can change the gender of the characters and reset the scene a bit... Does entering from a different perspective change the message for you?

In Jesus' triplet of stories, we go from a lost sheep who was of some worth, to a lost silver coin that was of significant monetary value, to a lost son who, though once cherished as a son, makes himself into a grotesque and undesirable character. He'd be easy to write off. In fact, most people would write him off – certainly the Pharisees would. And here is where our story actually begins... *This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them.*

This fellow, Jesus, was welcoming the very people others had written off – he was eating with them – socializing – accepting. And when Jesus overheard the muttering negativity, he told three stories that reveal the heart of God – a heart that is broken in two by lostness but a heart that sings with a joy when even the silliest sheep or the meanest of sons comes back – is found again.

The God revealed is like a shepherd who wanders around all night to find one lost sheep – like a woman who sweeps and cleans and searches her house to find a lost coin – like an old man who sits on the porch, straining his eyes as he stares down the road to the mailbox, hoping against hope to catch a glimpse of a lost child.

God is unwilling to lose anyone. Whereas some would blame the sheep for straying from the fold, Jesus says that God is out and about in the world, searching for us in order to bestow blessings on us – whereas some are willing to leave hidden those who get lost in the shuffle of life – unable to shine – Jesus says God is like a woman who searches and searches until she finds that coin – that talent – that hidden promise – and brings it forth.

And while some have no use for those who waste their potential – who squander their God-given talents on selfish and narcissistic pleasures – Jesus says God is like a loving

parent, who welcomes us home – who yearns and aches for us to come home – one who celebrates wildly when we get there.

Rejoice with me! I have found my lost sheep! *There will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over 99 righteous people who do not need to repent.*

Rejoice with me! I have found the coin that I lost! *In the same way there is joy in heaven over one sinner who repents.*

Rejoice with me! My lost child is returned! It is the most elaborate celebration yet. Robes and rings and shoes and fatted calves – a big band, the best scotch...

*...this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!* Think of the absolute foolishness of it – the extravagance...

But let's remember – there was a man who had two sons. He loved two children – went out to both – was generous to both – rejoices in the presence of both children despite the elder one's resentment and jealousy and anger.

I suppose the elder son is right to be upset – he is right that his brother is a wastrel and that he is the good child who works hard and that his father is ridiculously permissive and forgiving. In our heart of hearts, we struggle with God's love – grumbling at a love that makes a home for both sons – questioning the extravagance of the father. But sometimes we must choose between being right and being in relationship. Sometimes it's not about being right but about what is life-giving – it's about joy.

The older son lacked joy – like the Pharisees who can only complain about this fellow, Jesus and his challenge to their way of seeing God.

Jesus told these stories to those who complained about his habit of hanging out with sinners. He is reminding them – reminding us – that God loves all God's creatures and God's greatest joy is when someone wakes up, comes to a moment of self-awareness and begins to get their life and love and spirit in order.

In each of the "lost" stories there is an invitation to party – an open invitation – but we don't know if anyone came. We don't know if the elder brother eventually joins the celebration. The invitation stands – like an open door...

We are invited to be kind and loving and accepting of others – to be diligent in seeking out those who are far from God – to never give up on those in need. We are asked to look at ourselves – to examine our hearts and see what inner resentments, abandoned



hopes, unmet needs, petty jealousies and long-harboured hatreds are keeping us standing outside the celebration and the joy God promises.

God is always there looking for us – God has the broom out, sweeping every nook and cranny in search of us – God is ready to run and meet us as we return home.

This fellow, Jesus – God incarnate – is someone to emulate and embrace – someone to give thanks to and for – someone to befriend and to follow. *This fellow, Jesus, welcomes sinners and eats with them* – welcomes us all to the celebration – the invitation stands – an open door... **Amen**

➤ *We come to ask your forgiveness*

201

✠ Offering and Prayer

The Apostle Paul declared that in Christ there is a new creation. Everything has become new! What new things can God do with the gifts we offer today? With expectant hearts, let us place in God's hands what we have to offer in Christ's name.

➤ *Praise God from whom all blessings flow*

306

**We place these gifts into your hands, O God. Bless them with your transforming grace so that they may become seeds springing up with new life in the world you love. Fill our hearts with that same grace so we can bring hope to weary and worried lives in Jesus' name. Amen**

✠ Pastoral Prayers and the Lord's Prayer

Holy One, you are our God and we are your children. We give you thanks for all that you have done for us, and for all that you are to us. We bless you for the beauty, fertility and diversity of the earth, for the star-filled sky and the roaring seas, for the wonder of our existence.

We are amazed and thankful for those who especially love and cherish us, not only when we are lovable but even when we are awkward and unkind. For those who directly or indirectly serve our welfare, all those whose names we may not know, whose influence enriches our lives.

We bless you for Jesus who came among us full of strong, overflowing compassion and unrelenting truth – for your presence in his word and deeds, and for the liberating and healing power of his suffering, death and resurrection. We give thanks for the church, called into existence by the risen Christ, and for the Holy Spirit invigorating our faith and inspiring loving deeds.

O God, you are parent, sibling, friend and teacher. Today we ask that in our prayers and in the ordinary affairs of each day, we may exhibit your generous spirit toward others. We think especially of people and situations in need and offer our prayers in silence...

We pray for people who are displaced or experiencing homelessness or devastated by conflict – people we may never meet or have a conversation with – for destitute people everywhere – bless those humanitarian agencies and individuals who offer care, and all who give generously in support of that work. Give both wisdom and a generous spirit to governments and strengthen the social outreach ministry of churches.

We pray for any among us here today, who with dignity and courage are secretly enduring misfortunes or ongoing worries – give them your peace and healing. Keep us sensitive to those around and among us, that we may recognise a cry for help and respond with your generous hospitality and compassion.

We pray for all bewildered, lost souls – for all who find that career and hobbies, friends and family all fail to satisfy their deepest need. Gather us all into your loving arms, and help each of us to treat awkward, prickly people with the generous respect that you have for each person.

Loving Saviour, seeking the lost and the unlovely, we worship you. Caring Spirit, enabling the weak and the meek, we worship you. Holy God, generous beyond all calculation, we worship you as we pray together in Jesus' name **...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**

➤ *In the bulb there is a flower*

674

### Blessing

Get ready to go well. On the good days give thanks to God – on the bad days, give thanks to God. Think neither too highly of your successes nor put yourself down for your failures. You are a child of God – sufficiently beautiful and sufficiently flawed to receive the costly grace of Jesus. Go your way with a resilient and cheerful spirit – and may the grace of the Risen Christ, the love of God and the nurturing community of the Spirit embrace us all.

➤ *Go now in peace*