

Welcome to this act of worship. Take comfort that although you may be on your own, you are part of God's church, worshipping God together with others at this time.

Call to worship Psalm 32: 1,7 Happy are those whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. You are a hiding place for me; you preserve me from trouble; you surround me with glad cries of deliverance.

Gathering prayer On this Mothering Sunday, we open our hearts before you, faithful God, bringing those we love, and those we struggle to love, those we have lost, and those we are afraid of losing. We bring our tears and our joy, our disappointments and our hopes. We bring all that we carry and all that we long to lay down – in Jesus' name. **Amen.**

Hymn StF 443 Come, let us sing of a wonderful love Robert Walmsley

1 Come let us sing of a wonderful love,
tender and true;
out of the heart of the Father above,
streaming to me and to you:
wonderful love
dwells in the heart of the Father above.

3 Jesus is seeking the wanderers yet;
why do they roam?
Love only waits to forgive and forget;
home! weary wanderer, home!
Wonderful love
dwells in the heart of the Father above.

2 Jesus, the Saviour, this gospel to tell,
joyfully came;
came with the helpless and hopeless to dwell,
sharing their sorrow and shame;
seeking the lost,
saving, redeeming at measureless cost.

4 Come to my heart, O thou wonderful love,
come and abide,
lifting my life till it rises above
envy and falsehood and pride:
seeking to be
lowly and humble, a learner of thee.

Prayers

Praise & thanksgiving God of our families and our friends, we praise you for those who have inspired us, for those who have mothered us, for those who have been patient with us, for those who have nurtured our faith and shown us your love. **Amen.**

Confession Father, we confess that often we stray from your presence. Most of the time, it isn't wilful – we are just distracted by greener grass, perhaps, or the urge to explore new things.

We go our own way, until we are lost. Forgive us and help us find our way home to you.

What is the loss of one of your children when you have so many more, still safe in the fold?

Yet it does matter to you – and you come seeking with your outrageous love. And when child and Father are reunited, there is cause for great celebration!

We are sorry when we resent your generosity towards others, and judge their failures more harshly than our own. Forgive us and help us to find our way home.

Faithful God, in a world that judges and blames, you forgive and understand.

In a world that has no time for failure and mistakes, you forgive and understand.

Thank you that your heart is so full of love, love which never runs out. Amen

Reading Luke 15: 1-3, 11b-32 The Parable of the Prodigal Son and his brother

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 travelled 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. 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.’”

Reflection

This parable is the third in this section of Luke’s gospel that speaks of lost possessions, lost people; the lost sheep, the lost coin, the lost son. But the stories don’t end like that at all! The shepherd, taking the risk of leaving the remaining flock, searches until the lost sheep is found. After much sweeping and cleaning, the lost coin is recovered. After losing everything and much soul searching, the lost son returns home to an unexpected, rapturous welcome from his father.

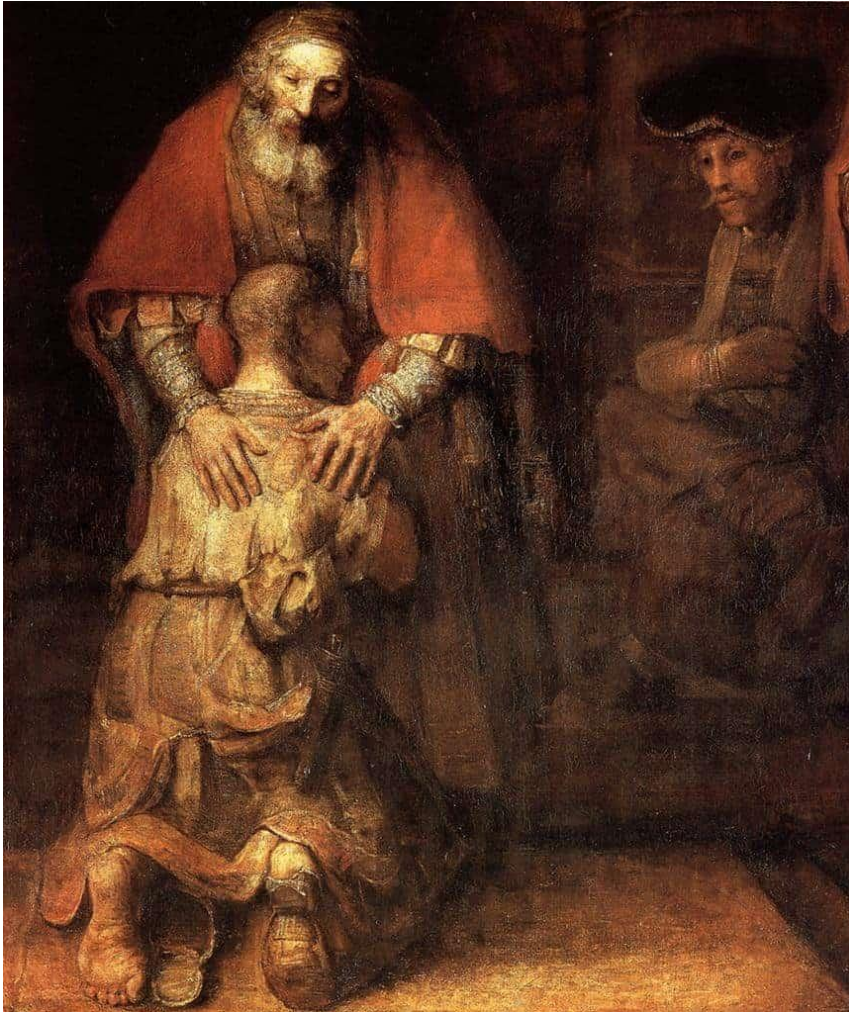
‘Reckless love’ is the title of a modern worship song by Cory Asbury and it speaks of the never-giving-up way in which God seeks to welcome and gather us into God’s loving embrace. Here are some of the lyrics:

‘Oh, the overwhelming, never-ending reckless love of God
Oh, it chases me down, fights 'til I'm found, leaves the 99
And I couldn't earn it,
I don't deserve it, still You give yourself away
Oh, the overwhelming, never-ending reckless love of God

There's no shadow You won't light up
Mountain You won't climb up

Coming after me
There's no wall You won't kick down
Lie You won't tear down
Coming after me'

No matter who we are or how we've lived our lives up until the present moment, God's loving, forgiving embrace is freely offered to all. It is not forced on anyone but God scans the horizon, looking and waiting for us, and then God comes running to meet us as we run into that embrace.



The return of the prodigal - Rembrandt

What do you notice about this painting?

Where do you see yourself in this picture or the parable?

What might you want to say to the Father?

What is the Father saying to you?

Spend some time in God's loving presence as you ponder the meaning of this picture for you.

Call to Intercession:

Rejoice in the Lord always. The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything, but in everything, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God.

God of forgiveness, we bring our prayers to you as acts of love for you and for our neighbours.

In your mercy, Lord, hear our prayer.

Your compassion reaches out to us. We pray for ourselves and those dear to us....

We come to you in times of need, O God; hear our prayer.

Your love seeks even those who are far from you. We pray for our community, our neighbours and our nation....

We come to you in times of need, O God; hear our prayer.

You are filled with compassion and long to embrace all your children. We pray for the church in all places, that we may be one....

We come to you in times of need, O God; hear our prayer.

You are rich in mercy toward all. We pray for the world, that your reign of peace may come, and your will be done on earth.

We come to you in times of need, O God; hear our prayer.

We offer you other concerns we carry in our hearts.

We come to you in times of need, O God; hear our prayer.

God of surprises, you sow your storied word in us with compassion.

As this day unfolds, show us mercy, that we extend it to others and live for the sake of your reign. In hope we pray:

Our Father, who art in heaven.....

Hymn StF 440 Amazing grace John Newton

Amazing grace (how sweet the sound)
that saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost, but now am found,
was blind, but now I see.

God's grace has taught my heart to fear,
his grace my fears relieved;
how precious did that grace appear
the hour I first believed!

Through many dangers, toils and snares
I have already come:
God's grace has brought me safe thus far,
and grace will lead me home.

The Lord has promised good to me,
his word my hope secures;
he will my shield and portion be
as long as life endures.

Yes, when this flesh and heart shall fail,
and mortal life shall cease:
I shall possess, within the veil,
a life of joy and peace.

When we've been there ten thousand years
Bright shining as the sun,
We've no less days to sing God's praise
Than when we first begun.

Blessing and sending

God of outrageous, generous love! Thank you that no-one is beyond the reach of your love, no matter what our mistakes, no matter how mean and grudging our love is.

As you welcome us with ever open arms, enlarge our hearts and minds,

to serve faithfully and to love outrageously too! **Amen.**

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