

WELCOME AND CALL TO WORSHIP: 'Those who are led by God are sons of God. For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father." The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children' (Romans 8:14-16).

SONGS: GOD, YOU HAVE DONE GREAT THINGS (Let your mercy rain)

**God, you have done great things
God, You give grace to the weak,
And bless the broken-hearted
with a song of praise to sing.
You reached down and lifted us up,
You came running, looking for us.
And now there's nothing,
and no one beyond Your love.**

*You're the overflow,
You're the fountain of my heart,
So let Your mercy rain,
let Your mercy rain on us.
You're the faithful One
when the world's falling apart.
So let Your mercy rain,
let Your mercy rain on us.*

**How deep, how wide,
how long, how high
Is Your love, is Your love.
How deep, how wide,
how long, how high
Is Your love, is Your love, O God.**

FATHER GOD, I WONDER

**Father God, I wonder how I managed to exist
Without the knowledge of Your parenthood
and Your loving care.
But now I am Your son (child),
I am adopted in Your family,
And I can never be alone,
'Cause Father God, You're there beside me.**

I will sing Your praises, I will sing Your praises,

*I will sing Your praises, forever more.
I will sing Your praises, I will sing Your praises,
I will sing Your praises, forever more.*

FATHER OF LIFE, DRAW ME CLOSER

**Father of Life, draw me closer,
Lord, my heart is set on You:
Let me run the race of time
With Your life enfolding mine,
And let the peace of God, let it reign.**

**O Holy Spirit, Lord, my comfort;
Strengthen me, hold my head up high:
And I stand upon Your truth,
Bringing glory unto You,
And let the peace of God, let it reign.**

*O Lord, I hunger for more of You;
Rise up within me, let me know Your truth.
O Holy Spirit, saturate my soul,
And let the life of God fill me now,
Let Your healing power
Breathe life and make me whole,
And let the peace of God, let it reign.*

FATHER GOD, FILL THIS PLACE

**Father God, fill this place
With Your love, with Your grace.
As we call on Your name,
Visit us in power again.**

*Lord, we worship You.
Lord, we worship You.
(Repeat)*

**Spirit come with Your peace;
Heal our wounds, bring release.
Lord we long for Your touch,
Fill our hearts with Your love.**

OPENING PRAYER

Father God, Lord of heaven and earth, we come into your awesome presence to offer you the praise of our lips and the love in our hearts. You call us to this place to be your holy people, and so we join together to praise your name. For the joy of your created world, for

our redemption in Christ our Lord, and for the empowerment of the Holy Spirit, we worship you. Gracious Lord, fill this place with your presence and our lives with your glory; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

CONFESSION

God of mercy and love, we come before you in need of forgiveness. We have sinned against you in not loving you with our whole heart, in not serving you with all our strength, in not loving our neighbour as ourselves. Forgive us, Lord, that we might be your joyful people once again. In Jesus' name. Amen.

ASSURANCE OF PARDON

God is merciful and kind, slow to anger and abounding in love. Hear his words of pardon. 'Your sins are forgiven.' Receive his gift of forgiveness and be at peace. **Amen.**

NOTICES

Infant baptism of Sherease Boone at 1pm today

Alpha in Farsi begins tomorrow at 7.30pm

All Angels Federation Summer Fayre Saturday 22 June, 12-3pm

Sunday 30th June – our fifth Sunday charity is for Medical Detection Dogs. Christine will say something about this charity next Sunday.

Also on Sunday 30th June, 6.30pm is a service led by the Quakers.

Sunday 7th July is a fellowship picnic after the service.

Sunday 14th July baptism of Andy Bristow – if you also want to be baptised, see me afterwards

OFFERTORY SONG: ABBA, FATHER

Abba, Father, let me be
Yours and yours alone
May my will for ever be
Ever more your own
Never let my heart grow cold
Never let me go
Abba, Father let me be
Yours and yours alone

OFFERTORY PRAYER

Merciful God, we offer to you all we are and all we have. Accept our praises and the gifts we bring before you. Bless these gifts that your name may be glorified; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER FOR SUNDAY CLUB

Lord Jesus, you grew up and know what it is to belong to a family and a community. We pray that our children here may know your love and the love of this church family, that they may grow in faith and love in Sunday Club today. In Jesus' name. **Amen.**

READING: Luke 15:11-32

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 Word of the Lord

Thanks be to God

REFLECTION: The Father Heart of God

On this Father's Day, we know that many people struggle with the idea that God is a Father. Many people struggle because of their experience of their earthly father. Maybe he was abusive, rude, overly critical, self-centred, uncaring, or maybe he was an absent father. Now there are plenty of good fathers, but there are and have been plenty of bad ones too. So, for many people, especially among feminist theologians, the idea of God as our Father is a barrier to getting to know the God revealed in Scripture.

The character of God as Father is revealed primarily in the teaching of Jesus as recorded in the gospels. It is here for the first time that God is revealed as the Father of the believer and not just Father of the nation. That revelation comes from Jesus himself. We read in the Garden of Gethsemane that when Jesus prayed he called God 'Abba, Father' (Mark 14:36). The term 'Abba' came way before the Swedish pop group! In the language of Jesus, Aramaic, the term Abba was the name a respectful child would give their father at every stage of their life. It's equivalent in modern English is 'Papa.' It speaks of affectionate respect. Some thought Abba meant daddy, but most people today don't call their father daddy when they've grown up. As Jesus used this term in both private prayer and in teaching his disciples about God, some have seen this as the most important feature of his teaching. The basis of the divine fatherhood of all believers is his fatherhood of Christ. We as believers have been adopted into God's family through faith in Christ (Ephesians 1:5).

Let's turn now to our reading from Scripture. In many modern Bibles, this passage is headed 'The parable of the lost son.' Many know it as the parable of the prodigal son. Many see in this parable that Jesus told that the central character in the parable is the younger son. But in this parable, along with the two previous parables, the emphasis is on the loser – the shepherd loses a sheep, the woman loses a coin, and here the father loses a son. This parable begins "There was a man who had two sons" (v11). It is the father that is the central character in this parable. It is the father's pain, inflicted on him by the younger son's recklessness and the elder son's pride that Jesus means us to see. It is the Father's joy when the younger son returns home that Jesus wants us to notice. This is really the parable of the waiting father. What else does Jesus want us to see in this parable about God our Father?

The context for this parable is that tax collectors and sinners were all gathering around Jesus to listen to him, but the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered "This man welcomes sinners, and eats with them" (v2). They thought Jesus was acting in an ungodly way, so Jesus responded with these three parables. Jesus says that God doesn't write off people because they are lost to him. God loves the sinner before he repents of his sin, which

is why when he does repent God is eager to welcome him back into the family, to forgive him and to celebrate with him.

When the lost son had reached his lowest point, he decided he would be better off at home as a slave. Jesus said, "So he got up and went to his father" (v20). It was to his father he went, not to his home or to his village or even to his family. As the son walked to his father, he rehearsed his speech. Those listening to Jesus tell this parable would have expected the father to refuse to welcome his younger son as he had disgraced the family.

I once ran away from home when my step-grandmother visited from Sweden. I cannot remember why I ran away, but I felt so guilty about upsetting my step-grandmother that I bought a pot plant for her. I went home because I was getting hungry, and didn't receive the welcome I expected. My mum, in her wisdom, rather than saying "Where have you been?" simply said "How kind of you to buy granny a plant." My hunger and guilt drove me home, and this is what happened with the younger son.

The parable continues: "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 around him and kissed him" (v20). What a response! The father did something middle-eastern men did not do, he ran to his son. The normal way is to walk slowly. There is little compassion on one who has disgraced the family and squandered the family wealth. Most middle-eastern fathers would not react like this, but that is the point of this parable. It's not about a human father at all. It is about a heavenly Father.

Here we see the passion in the Father heart of God, a love that will not give in to despair or revenge or hate, a love that longs to forgive. The son never got to finish his speech. His father interrupted him with joy. That his lost son was home was a reason to celebrate, and the father called for three gifts – a robe, a ring and shoes. The robe, the best robe, was a mark of high honour, much like the robe Jacob gave to Joseph (Genesis 37:3). The ring was a mark of authority, used to seal official documents. By giving the ring the father was entrusting his son with full authority in all the matters of his household and land, in effect to act in his father's name. The giving of the ring was a sign of complete trust in his son. Thirdly, shoes were worn by free people in that society. Slaves went barefoot. By giving shoes to his son, the father was welcoming him back into the family. He was a son once again, a free man.

In this parable we see that Jesus' ministry of teaching and seeking and saving the lost is the concern of God the Father himself. We see here the Father heart of God, who longs for us to come to him, whether we are like the foolish younger son or like the hard-hearted older brother. Both sons need to discover their father's love for them. Maybe you need to do the same this morning. Maybe you have had a poor or non-existent relationship with your earthly father. Today I pray you will grasp the depth of the Father's love for you, and discover just how much he rejoices over you when you come to him. He longs for you to be honoured by being called a child of God.

And for you who know the Father heart of God, I give you this quote from the classic book 'The Father Heart of God', by Floyd McClung: He writes, 'Our willingness to be used as God's vessels can make His Father-heart a reality to our hurting world.' When we have discovered God's father heart for us, we can take that good news into our desperate and difficult world to others who also need to experience God's Father-heart for them. Let's pray.

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

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
Lead us not into temptation
But deliver us from evil
For the kingdom, the power
and the glory are yours
now and for ever. Amen.

SONG: Great is Thy faithfulness

Great is Thy faithfulness O God my Father,
There is no shadow of turning with Thee;
Thou changest not, Thy compassions, they fail not;
As Thou hast been Thou forever wilt be.

*Great is Thy faithfulness! Great is Thy faithfulness!
Morning by morning new mercies I see;
All I have needed Thy hand hath provided,
Great is Thy faithfulness, Lord, unto me!*

Summer and winter, and springtime and harvest,
Sun, moon and stars in their courses above,
Join with all nature in manifold witness
To Thy great faithfulness, mercy and love.

*Great is Thy faithfulness! Great is Thy faithfulness!
Morning by morning new mercies I see;
All I have needed Thy hand hath provided,
Great is Thy faithfulness, Lord, unto me!*

**Pardon for sin and a peace that endureth,
Thine own dear presence to cheer and to guide;
Strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow,
Blessings all mine, with ten thousand beside!**

***Great is Thy faithfulness! Great is Thy faithfulness!
Morning by morning new mercies I see;
All I have needed Thy hand hath provided,
Great is Thy faithfulness, Lord, unto me!***

CLOSING PRAYER AND BLESSING

Father God, we thank you for your faithfulness to us, for your love for us, and your Spirit within us. May we honour you this week by making your love known to others; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

And the blessing of God Almighty, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit be among you and remain with you always. **Amen.**

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