

**Bangor & Holyhead Methodist Circuit**  
**Sunday Worship Sheet 30<sup>th</sup> March 2025**

Our worship for this week was written by Jean Ware. You may wish to have your Bible to hand. Please note the hymns are now at the back of the sheet for ease of printing. CCLI licence 556292

**Call to worship:** Let us thank God for the love that holds us in being, moment by moment, ever welcoming us home.

**Hymn 370 Breathe on me breath of God**

**Prayer of Adoration** God of endless love and wide-open arms, we come in adoration. Thank you that the love of parents for their children, can show us a little of what your love is like. But your love is extraordinary, beyond that of any human mother or father. Your embrace encompasses all. We adore you for Jesus who laid aside his power, and came to show us what your love is like, transforming all who respond to live new and loving lives. God of endless love and wide-open arms we come in adoration. Amen

**Prayer of Confession and Assurance of Forgiveness**

Loving God, for the times when we choose to go our own way, when we are thoughtless or selfish, not caring how others will be affected by our actions. For the resentment we harbour when other people are treated better than we think they deserve. For the times when you were relying on us to offer a welcome, and we let you down, and for the times when we have refused to join the celebration, though through our friends you pleaded with us to be there. For all the thoughts, words and actions that failed to show love – Forgive us, and renew us, and welcome us home.

*Pause for reflection.*

Loving God, Thank you for forgiving us, thank you for your love that seeks and restores. Help us to joyfully join your work of reconciliation. **Amen.**

**Readings: 2 Corinthians 5 verses 16-21, Luke 15 verses 1-3 and 11-32**

**Reflection**

The gospel reading for today is one of Jesus' most well-known parables- It's often called "The Prodigal Son", it's also sometimes called 'The Loving Father.' If you read the whole of Luke chapter 15, rather than missing out verses 4-10, as the lectionary suggests, you will discover that this is the third of three parables which Jesus tells about people celebrating when they find things which have been lost. So- yet another possible title for today's parable could be 'the lost son'. I wonder, though, if we should call it 'The two brothers', because both brothers have an important role to play in the story.

Something it's easy to miss in this parable is that it's the father who takes the initiative. He sees the younger son in the distance, perhaps with his steps slowing as he approaches home, his mind occupied with all sorts of questions – what will his reception be like? Will his father throw him out, and tell him that he never wants to see him again? Perhaps in the midst of his apprehension, there's a glimmer of hope- after all hadn't his father been understanding beyond what he had any right to expect, when he'd demanded his share of the family estate? He keeps rehearsing his speech, will it do the trick? And then the young man spots the figure running towards him- At first he can't believe his eyes -It's his father, who has thrown dignity to the winds and rushed to

embrace him- The carefully prepared speech is never used- his father is simply overjoyed to have him back.

The father's behaviour is absolutely extraordinary- that's something else that's easy for us to miss, as our society is one in which status is not necessarily shown by the clothes you wear and how you walk, or sit and so on. The son has already brought shame on his family by demanding his share of the family estate, which almost certainly meant that land had to be sold off to meet his demands. But the father did as he requested. As if that wasn't enough, the young man had then left home and gone to a foreign country; effectively saying to his family that he wanted nothing more to do with them. Now the father throws his dignity to the winds and runs to meet the boy. If there were neighbours about in the street, they will have been astonished. What's this- a man of his position running! And then, throwing his arms around the dishevelled son, who he ought by rights to have refused to even speak to, why, he's undermining the whole social order! To cap it all he throws a massive welcome home party. And says Jesus, that's just what God is like.

But what about the elder brother- the other son? He has stayed home, working in the family business, just as would have been expected of him. He can't believe his ears when the servants tell him that the party is because his younger brother has returned- or at least he doesn't want to believe it-What has his brother done to deserve such a welcome?- Nothing- And, of course he's right, the younger brother does not deserve the welcome he gets. But that's the point, it's not a case of him needing to win back his father's love, his father has never for a moment stopped loving him, and now, at last, he has him back. In a final twist to the story, when the father hears his older son is out in the yard refusing to join in, he again takes the initiative, leaves his guests and goes out to him. He loves both his sons; he doesn't want reconciliation with the younger boy to put a distance between him and the older son. We are not told if the older son heeded his father's pleas. He's clearly full of resentment. While he's been working on the farm, obeying his father's orders, his brother has been away living it up, making no contribution, and it seems he's to get off scot-free.

There's a danger in trying to match up any of the characters in Jesus' parables too closely with God, or with particular people in 1st century society. But, in his picture of the elder brother, the pharisees and scribes will almost certainly have recognised that Jesus is asking them to look at themselves. Why aren't they pleased when the tax-collectors, and others from the very edges of society come and listen to Jesus? Is it because they have always seen the rules they try so assiduously to keep as a burden imposed from outside, rather than a way of life they have freely chosen? Or perhaps they see themselves as better, more worthy, than those sinners. Jesus reminds them that a relationship with God is not about keeping a set of rules and regulations, it's about love, love for God, *and* love for those God loves - all because God loves us.

There's probably a bit of the older brother in most of us; we can easily slip into 'keeping the rules', doing things dutifully rather than joyfully, and of being resentful of those who seem to be welcomed with open arms despite not keeping those same rules.

When anyone responds positively to the gospel message, it's a cause for celebration, God loves each of us so much that he longs for reconciliation, and at the slightest sign that we might want that too, he runs to meet us.

When he writes to the Corinthians that ‘God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, no longer holding people’s misdeeds against them,...’ he is describing how the father behaves in that parable- It is love which leads the father to run to meet his son, and it is love, unimaginably generous love which brought Christ to the cross. Love says Paul is capable of transforming the world- and it’s the only thing that can. When we love someone, we see them with differently, the crooked nose acquired long ago in a playground fight is no longer a physical flaw but a mark of their wonderful uniqueness. Forty years ago now, I went to India for a conference, and came back with a very nasty tummy bug. I still remember getting up one morning, and suddenly knowing that I was better. I dressed in my running kit and set off for a run. It was as if, the bug finally gone, I was seeing the world in a new light- The trees in the gardens along the suburban street had a beauty I hadn’t noticed before, and the dew sparkled in the sunlight. That, says Paul, is how recognising and responding to what God has done for us in Christ enables us to respond to everyone and everything, it’s a transformation. Of course, in practice we slip backwards and forwards between the old order and the new; the transformation is not yet complete, but we can no longer live as we once did, for God has enlisted us in the ministry of reconciliation. The world may seem a very dark place at present, but seeing it through the eyes of love enables us to see that even now, the transformation is taking place, and to play our part in it.

### **Hymn 462 Come with me come wander**

#### **Prayers for others and ourselves**

We pray for the life of the world; as those who hold power deliberate over what should happen to those who feel powerless. Help all those who take part in negotiations to remember that every individual is someone’s child or parent, someone’s friend, and to work for peace with justice, and the true reconciliation which Christ died to bring. We pray for leaders with difficult decisions to make about how to balance the needs of their own country against the needs of the world, help them to remember that every individual is equally precious to you.

On this mothering Sunday we remember all those who find today difficult: women and men who would have loved to have children but do not, families where parents and children are estranged, parents whose children have died. We pray for mothers who go without, so that their children can eat, and those who have nothing to give their children. We pray for all who show love to those who have no parents, we think especially of children whose parents have been killed in conflict, in the Holy Land, in Ukraine, in Sudan, and so many other places.

We pray for your church here on earth, as it seeks to speak your word of peace to those at war with one another, and for all who try to be reconcilers. We pray especially for those who continue to keep alive the spark of hope, as they reach out to old enemies with words of love. Help us to see how to support them. God, who in Christ is transforming and making all things new, renew your Spirit within us, that we may become part of your work of reconciliation. Amen **The Lord’s Prayer**

#### **Hymn 440 Amazing grace**

**Final Prayer:** Parent God, As we go into the coming week, fill us with your grace, mercy and peace. Bless us, keep us and transform us, and may your Spirit enable us to love unconditionally all who we meet. **Amen.**

### Hymn 370

- 1 Breathe on me, Breath of God ;  
fill me with life anew,  
that I may love what thou dost love,  
and do what thou wouldst do.
- 2 Breathe on me, Breath of God,  
until my heart is pure,  
until with thee I will one will,  
to do and to endure.
- 3 Breathe on me, Breath of God,  
till I am wholly thine,  
until this earthly part of me  
glows with thy fire divine.
- 4 Breathe on me, Breath of God ;  
so shall I never die,  
but live with thee the perfect life  
of thine eternity.

Edwin Hatch (1835–1889)

### Hymn 462

- 1 Come with me, come wander, come  
welcome the world  
where strangers might smile or where  
stones may be hurled ;  
come leave what you cling to, lay down  
what you clutch  
and find, with hands empty, that hearts can  
hold much.  
*Sing hey for the carpenter leaving his  
tools !*  
*Sing hey for the pharisees leaving their  
rules !*  
*Sing hey for the fishermen leaving their  
nets !*  
*Sing hey for the people who leave their  
regrets !*
- 2 Come walk in my company, come sleep by  
my side,  
come savour a lifestyle with nothing to  
hide ;  
come sit at my table and eat with my  
friends,  
discovering that love which the world never  
ends.
- 3 Come share in my laughter, come close to  
my fears,  
come find yourself washed with the kiss of  
my tears ;  
come stand close at hand while I suffer and  
die  
and find in three days how I never will lie.
- 4 Come leave your possessions, come share  
out your treasure,

come give and receive without method or  
measure ;  
come loose every bond that's resisting the  
Spirit,  
enabling the earth to be yours to inherit.  
John L. Bell (b. 1949) and Graham Maule (b. 1958)

### Hymn 440

- 1 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.
- 2 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 !
- 3 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.
- 4 The Lord has promised good to me,  
his word my hope secures ;  
he will my shield and portion be  
as long as life endures.
- 5 And, when this heart and flesh shall fail  
and mortal life shall cease,  
I shall possess within the veil  
a life of joy and peace.
- 6 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.

John Newton (1725–1807) (*alt.*)