

**Matthew 18:20**

*For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them.*

**St. Mary's Church Watton  
Sunday Worship  
14<sup>th</sup> February 2021**

Welcome and Introduction

Welcome to our Sunday worship service on Zoom for Sunday 14<sup>th</sup> February, Sunday next before Lent.

Everyone will be on mute except for those who will be speaking or reading. But we encourage you to join in with Andy who is our responder for today and respond with him by saying everything in bold. We will have two simple Taizé chants during this time of worship as well, so if you would like to join in with me at home either humming or singing then please do! We won't hear each other while everyone is on mute at home but we will be together in our simple praise. We will repeat each chant 6 times.

Afterwards we will stay online for a little while for everyone to unmute and have a catch up – and that's when we will have our notices, so do stay with us!

And so now we take a few moments to gather ourselves as we prepare to worship our gracious and loving God, giving thanks for this opportunity to come together as community in love and faith.

*(Silence)*

Let us begin with a collect about God's love:

God of wonder and of joy:  
grace comes from you,  
and you alone are the source of life and love.  
Without you, we cannot please you;  
without your love, our deeds are worth nothing.  
Send your Holy Spirit,  
and pour into our hearts  
that most excellent gift of love,  
that we may worship you now  
with thankful hearts  
and serve you always with willing minds;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord.  
**Amen.**

We all wander far from God, and in these difficult times we may feel distant, disconnected and separated from those we care about and maybe even from God's love. We are made in God's image and in that image made to be in community with each other and with him and so this third lockdown is hard to bear. Our frustrations and negativity are very real.

We come then in that reality to bring our confession to the one who came to save us. We come with empty hands and with heavy hearts to lay down our burdens together at the foot of the cross, knowing that he who loves us so dearly holds his arms open to us with his unending sacrifice of love.

### Confession

Christ came in humility to share our lives:  
forgive our pride.  
Lord, have mercy.  
**Lord, have mercy.**

Christ came with good news for all people:  
forgive our silence.  
Christ, have mercy.  
**Christ, have mercy.**

Christ came in love to a world of suffering:  
forgive our self-centredness.  
Lord, have mercy.  
**Lord, have mercy.**

### Absolution

May the God of love  
Bring us back to himself,  
Forgive us our sins,  
And assure us of his eternal love  
In Jesus Christ our Lord.  
**Amen**

### First Reading

#### **The Parable of the Lost Sheep**

Now the tax collectors and sinners were all gathering around to hear Jesus. But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them."

Then Jesus told them this parable: "Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Doesn't he leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after

the lost sheep until he finds it? And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbours together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.' I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent.

### Responses

**The Lord is close to the broken-hearted; blessed be the Lord.**

I will bless the Lord at all times,  
God's praise always on my lips;  
glorify the Lord with me,  
together let us praise God's name.

**The Lord is close to the broken-hearted; blessed be the Lord.**

I sought the Lord and was heard;  
from all my terrors set free.  
When the poor cry out the Lord hears them  
and rescues them from all their distress.

**The Lord is close to the broken-hearted; blessed be the Lord.**

The Lord is close to the broken-hearted;  
those whose spirit is crushed God will save.  
Many are the trials of the upright  
but the Lord will come to rescue them.

**The Lord is close to the broken-hearted; blessed be the Lord.**

### Second Reading

**The Parable of the Lost Coin**

"Or suppose a woman has ten silver coins and loses one. Doesn't she light a lamp, sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it? And when she finds it, she calls her friends and neighbours together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost coin.' In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents."

Taizé Chant - Jubilate (Laudate Dominum) x6

**Laudate Dominum, Laudate Dominum  
Omnes gentes, alleluia!**

*(Trans: Sing, praise and bless the Lord, sing, praise and bless the Lord,  
All peoples, alleluia!)*

### Third Reading

#### **The Parable of the Lost Son**

Jesus continued: "There was a man who had two sons. The younger one said to his father, 'Father, give me my share of the estate.' So, he divided his property between them.

"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. After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. So, he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything.

"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! I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired servants.' 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 around him and kissed him.

"The son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.'

"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. Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' So, they began to celebrate.

"Meanwhile, the older son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. So he called one of the servants and asked him what was going on. 'Your brother has come,' he replied, 'and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.'

"The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So, his father went out and pleaded with him. 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. But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!'

“My son,’ the father said, ‘you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. 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.’”

## Talk

Today is St. Valentine’s Day – you may groan at the commercialisation of it all. (*Indeed, I tried to buy a bunch of flowers for someone’s birthday on Friday and it was almost impossible to find some that weren’t wrapped in “Happy Valentine’s” paper!*) but amidst the busyness of the world at large it is still a reminder to give thanks for those we loved and those we have loved in our lives. It is also an opportunity to pause and give thanks for God’s love for us.

So, it is right then, that today we shall look at the three parables that make up Luke chapter 15, where Jesus is telling us about God’s love for us. The stories of the Lost Sheep, the Lost Coin and the Lost Son, reveal to us the abundant love of God.

The stories are about three lost things and three people who lovingly seek what was lost and upon finding them celebrate with great rejoicing.

The first speaks of the love of God the Son for the lost sheep, the second speaks of the love of God, the Holy Spirit for the lost coin, and the third of the love of God the Father for the lost son.

Like me you may have had a time when you have lost something – your purse or wallet, your phone or even a beloved pet. My dog Aimee ran off in the forest once and I spent hours searching for her before she returned as if nothing had happened! The value and importance we attach to something is revealed by how much time and effort we give towards finding it when it is lost and by our joy when we do find it. These stories show us how valuable, special and important we are to God.

Jesus told these three parables together to prove to the scribes and the Pharisees that their way of thinking about God was all wrong. That our God is the God of welcome.

Thinking about the first story of the lost sheep. When it was with the shepherd, under his care and guidance it was safe, but out in the wilderness on its own it was in danger – surely it would die without the shepherd’s protection and care.

We all wander far from God. The prophet Isaiah compares us all to sheep: “All we like sheep, have gone astray we have turned every one to his own way” (Isaiah 53:6). We get lost, we are alone and so we ask how can we find our way home?

Then we remember what Jesus said: “I am the Good Shepherd, the Good Shepherd gives His life for the sheep... I lay down my life for the sheep” (John 10:11,15). In this story we are told that the shepherd loved every single one of his sheep and he went out into the wilderness to bring the one lost sheep home.

We all need to be found by the Good Shepherd. He is searching for us. He calls to us through these stories. When we call to him, like lost and bleating sheep we can be sure that in love he hears us and comes to find us.

It is important too, to remember that when a sheep is found, it is not just restored and reunited to the shepherd but also to the 99 others of the flock. The shepherd carried the sheep on his shoulders all the way home, rejoicing.

**Doesn't all this seem a bit over the top? Yes! That's exactly what God's love for us is like. It's abundant and excessive!**

The second story is about a woman, (the Holy Spirit) who had lost just one of her coins. It had fallen on the dusty floor of the house. She had to light a lamp to look for it as the house was dark. This is really a picture of us lost in the darkness far from God. Our value is great but it can be hidden in the dirt and dust of the world.

This one coin was so valuable to the woman that she lit a lamp and grovelled about in the dust and dirt looking for it, not giving up until she recovered it. When she found the coin, she lifted it up and rejoiced. Then she called her friends and neighbours saying: "Rejoice with me- for I have found the piece which I had lost." You, me – we are that one coin. We are so special to God that the Holy Spirit searches after us all our lives and when we are found we are lifted out of the dust and God's love shines on us and through us.

**Doesn't all this seem a bit over the top? Yes! That's exactly what God's love for us is like. It's abundant and excessive!**

The Parable of the Prodigal Son is the last of the three. Like the father in the story, God's love is extremely generous. We, on the other hand are like the son, when we are far from the Father we lose everything and end up in a spiritual famine. The son shows true repentance – when he had hit rock bottom, when he had wandered so far and lost so much that he was hankering after the food for the pigs, he finally understood that believing that he knew best for his own life was just foolish. Sometimes we too have to hit rock bottom before we can wake up and turn around. This is what the son did, in his repentance he did a complete about-turn and headed home. He knew what he had done was awful but he knew his father was good so there was real hope.

And what happened next took him by surprise, and it shocked the Pharisees listening to the story, who like the elder brother, expected the father to totally reject him.

"But when he was still a great way off, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him" (v20). You see, he had turned his back on his father, but his father had not turned His back on his beloved son. Perhaps everyday he woke up thinking 'I hope he comes home today.' He was always looking. And then one day with his heart full of love he saw him and he ran to him with all his strength. When you come back to God, He runs to you. The father gave him a big hug, kissing him again and again. He was so happy to see him. God loves us from the heart. He will take us back in.

**Doesn't all this seem a bit over the top? Yes! That's exactly what God's love for us is like. It's abundant and excessive!**

Let us give thanks together for God's love for us, for all of us. And let us respond with love.

### Creed

We are a community bound together in faith and love for God and for each other. We seek to reflect that faith and that love so freely given to us, out into God's world and so we say together this affirmation of our belief.

You may wish to say it all the way through with me, or to respond where it is written in bold.

We believe in one God,  
the Father, the Almighty,

**maker of heaven and earth,  
of all that is,  
seen and unseen.**

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ,  
the only Son of God,  
eternally begotten of the Father,

**God from God,  
Light from Light,  
true God from true God,**

begotten, not made,  
of one Being with the Father.

**Through him all things were made.**

For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven,  
was incarnate from the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary,  
and was made man.

**For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate;  
he suffered death and was buried.**

On the third day he rose again  
in accordance with the Scriptures;

**he ascended into heaven  
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.  
He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead,  
and his kingdom will have no end.**

We believe in the Holy Spirit,

**the Lord, the giver of life,**

who proceeds from the Father and the Son.

**With the Father and the Son he is worshipped and glorified.**

He has spoken through the prophets.

**We believe in one holy, catholic and apostolic Church.**

We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.

**We look for the resurrection of the dead,  
and the life of the world to come. Amen.**

### Prayers

We pray for God's grace.

To the bidding, "Lord, receive our praise"  
please respond with "**and hear our prayer.**"

Lord, receive our praise  
**and hear our prayer.**

Lord God, through your grace we are your people:  
through the love of your Son you have redeemed us;  
in your Spirit you have made us as your own.

We pray for our Church,  
Our ministers, our volunteers, for every member of our church family,  
For anyone who may be at the edges of our community of faith  
For those who do not yet know your love.  
We pray in love for people of other faiths  
and for cultures different to our own.

May our hearts respond to your love.

Lord, receive our praise  
**and hear our prayer.**

We pray for the world, for places of crisis, of war or civil unrest,  
We lift before you in particular our European friends and neighbours,  
And everywhere trying to roll out vaccination programmes  
And trying to keep their people safe.  
We lift before you the community where we live  
And ask for your love and protection  
During these difficult times.

Make our lives bear witness to your glory in the world.

Lord, receive our praise  
**and hear our prayer.**

We pray for our NHS workers and volunteers  
For anyone who is sick, and for those who care for them.  
We pray for our schools and schoolteachers  
For parents and carers home schooling children  
We lift before you students at universities across the country  
And we take a moment to pray in the quiet of our hearts  
For anyone we know who is in need at this time  
Or who has asked for our prayers  
We pray for those who have no one to pray for them this day....

Make our wills eager to obey,  
and our hands ready to help.  
Lord, receive our praise  
**and hear our prayer.**

We give thanks for our families and friends  
For the love and help we receive from others  
Make our voices one with all your people  
in heaven and on earth.

*(A moment of silence)*

Lord of life,  
**hear our prayer,  
and make us one in heart and mind  
to serve you and each other with joy for ever.  
Amen.**

Let us draw together all of our thoughts and prayers in the prayer that Jesus himself taught us:

**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.  
Save us from the time of trial  
and deliver us from evil.  
For the kingdom, the power,  
and the glory are yours  
now and for ever.  
Amen.**

Taizé Chant – Jesus, remember me

**Jesus, remember me, when you come into your kingdom**  
**Jesus, remember me, when you come into your kingdom x6**

Responses

We remember and give thanks for God's love for us.

This is love, not that we loved God,  
**but that he loved us and sent his Son.**

He is the sacrifice for our sins,  
**that we might live through him.**

If God loves us so much  
**we ought to love one another.**

If we love one another  
**God lives in us.**

*cf 1 John 4.10-12*

Closing prayer

God of our salvation,  
you have restored us to life,  
you have brought us back again into your love  
by the triumphant death and resurrection of Christ.

Continue to heal us,  
as we go to live and work  
in the power of your Spirit,  
to your praise and glory.

**Amen**

To a troubled world  
**Peace from Christ.**

To a searching world  
**Love from Christ.**

To a waiting world  
**Hope from Christ.**

### Blessing

The love of the Lord Jesus  
Draw us to himself,  
The power of the Lord Jesus  
Strengthen us in his service,  
The joy of the Lord Jesus fill our hearts  
And the blessing of God Almighty,  
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,  
be amongst us,  
and remain with us all this day and always.

**Amen**

### Dismissal

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord

**In the name of Christ.**

**Amen**