



Order of Service
11th September 2022

TiS 156 Morning has broken (verses 1 and 3)

Call to worship

God calls us in many ways, and so we come together.

God speaks to us on the wind and in the sting of the winter rain;

In the warmth of lives lived,

and in the knowledge shared through generations until it becomes wisdom;

through prophets old and new, through the twists and turns of life.

God calls and we come.

Opening Prayer

God of abundant grace, may your Holy Spirit be with us now
as we worship you this day.

Open our eyes to truly see one another,
that we might discover your presence in the smile of a neighbour.

Open our ears to the needs of the world,
that we might hear your wisdom in the words spoken around us.

And open our hearts to your grace and love,
that we might find guidance and strength for the journey,
for ourselves and for one another. **Amen.**

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

I acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the lands on which we are meeting today. I pay my respects to Elders past, present and emerging, and celebrate the diversity of Aboriginal peoples and their ongoing cultures and connections to the lands and waters of this region.

Welcome

TiS 143 Immortal, invisible, God only wise

Litany of Praise

The world around us is full of beauty

We praise your name O God.

For the gift of life on earth

We praise your name O God.

Open our eyes to see your artistry

Your image in all that you have made.

Where our praise is short or silent

All creation sings out with joy.

Here we join creation's song

We praise your name O God. Amen

Reading: Jeremiah 4:11-12, 22-28

¹ At that time it will be said to this people and to Jerusalem: A hot wind comes from me out of the bare heights in the desert toward the daughter of my people, not to winnow or cleanse, ¹² a wind too strong for that. Now it is I who speak in judgment against them.



- ²² "For my people are foolish; they do not know me;
they are stupid children;
they have no understanding.
They are skilled in doing evil
but do not know how to do good."
- ²³ I looked on the earth, and it was complete chaos,
and to the heavens, and they had no light.
- ²⁴ I looked on the mountains, and they were quaking,
and all the hills moved to and fro.
- ²⁵ I looked, and there was no one at all,
and all the birds of the air had fled.
- ²⁶ I looked, and the fruitful land was a desert,
and all its cities were laid in ruins
before the LORD, before his fierce anger.
- ²⁷ For thus says the LORD: The whole land shall be a desolation,
yet I will not make a full end.
- ²⁸ Because of this the earth shall mourn
and the heavens above grow black,
for I have spoken; I have purposed;
I have not relented, nor will I turn back.

Prayer of Confession

O God, when we are unkind to people, and forget they are God's children,
when we are careless with the beasts, and forget they are God's creation,
when we ill-treat the land, and forget the splendour of God,

Forgive us, O God of love, and reconcile us to yourself, to one another and to the creation.

Teach us that the earth and all its fullness is yours, the world and all who dwell in it.
Remind us that your Son too enjoyed the fruits of the harvest in Galilee
and joins us now as we celebrate your good gifts together.

Call us again to safeguard the gift of life, now and forever. Amen

AN EARLY WORD

TiS 146 God who made the earth

Bible Readings: Luke 15:1-10 1 Timothy 1:12-17

Reflection

Today we come to a very familiar passage in which Jesus tells three parables about seeking out the lost. The stories of the lost sheep and the lost coin are followed by the parable of the lost son, and they are stories with which we can identify, because we've all lost something, or someone, over our years. Sometimes, thankfully we have found that which was lost and reacted with joy, and there are other occasions when the lost is never found despite our best efforts at searching.

As we reflect on Jesus' parables today, it's helpful to understand the setting. We learn from the beginning of chapter 14 that Jesus is at a meal table, and he's already told several parables which have probably offended the Pharisees and scribes who are looking on. As we move into chapter 15 the tax collectors and sinners are drawing even closer to this remarkable teacher, surrounded by the grumbling Pharisees who clearly believe they shouldn't be there. "This fellow welcomes sinners and even eats with them".



In effect there are two quite distinct groups of listeners poring over Jesus every word. We have the self-righteous Pharisees sneering at Jesus because he is engaging with such lowly company at the table, and there are *the tax collectors and sinners*, all members of the alleged “bad company” talking with and listening to Jesus. Who was Jesus directing his words to on this occasion? Was it the tax collectors and sinners who were gathered all around him for dinner that evening or was it the eye-rolling and cynical Pharisees who are critiquing Jesus from a distance? Well, it is probably *both*, and I wonder how differently these parables sounded in the ears of those two groups. How does each group hear what Jesus is saying?

Let’s start with the “bad company” in front of Jesus. To them these must have been potentially life changing stories. They knew they were lost, an idea reinforced by regular reminders that this was so in the eyes of the Pharisees. The Pharisees and their company never failed to signal the message that people like these tax collectors and the like were *not* God’s kind of people. They were lost to God. They were, therefore, unwelcome among the truly righteous and the only thing they would ever accomplish would be to contaminate the already found and saved people. It’s interesting isn’t it that the religious establishment viewed the so-called sinners as so lost that it seemed to never occur to them to reach out and assist in their restoration.

So if you fit into the category of a “lost cause” and then hear Jesus tell three stories about how God never gives up on looking for the one who is lost . . . what wonderful Good News. What’s more, to hear that there was even *more* joy over one of these being found than in the legalistic piety of the so-called already found must have moved this group of listeners to overwhelming wonderment. They are hearing that there’s no such thing as lost causes - just lost and wandering people waiting to be found by God’s grace.

It goes without saying that Jesus’ parables sounded rather different in the ears of the Pharisees. In the Parable of the Lost Sheep and the Parable of the Lost Coin joy bursts out all over and there is no mistaking the fact that such divine joy is aimed at Jesus’ “bad company” and not at the Pharisees themselves. Even a modicum of compassion may have enabled them to share in the joy, but their binding legalism makes them incapable of doing so. In the end - just to be sure no one misses the point - Jesus will conclude his third parable with an elder brother refusing to enter into the joy of a party celebrating the return of his brother. So there is no way the Pharisees will miss recognizing themselves in the portrait of that ungracious son.

What do we make of these parables in our place and time?

One commentator I read offered the following thoughts, and I quote:

“I wonder sometimes which set of ears most characterises many people in the church today. Does the gospel sound wonderful to us only when we see ourselves as the target of God’s grace and joy and happiness? Or does it sound best to us when we see others getting caught up in the divine embrace, even if those “others” are people very unlike us (and maybe even people we ourselves do not particularly care for or are able to relate to)? And if we can feel joy over the salvation of “others,” is it because we properly know that when you get right down to it, we are all the same? We all need the same amount of grace.”

We all need the same amount of grace. They are profound words. We are here by grace, and we make mistakes along the way, and by grace are forgiven and given the freedom to move on. This measure of grace is no more and no less than the grace extended to the homeless person you have been supporting during the winter, or the drug addict trying to come clean.

As the parables make so clear, God cares for every single person and treasures every single human being. Jesus did not want tax collectors and sinners to be separated from Pharisees and scribes. He wanted joy in God’s one human family.

We hear the joy coming through Paul’s letter to Timothy... “But I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief, and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in

Christ Jesus." To this day and forever, Jesus searches out the lost. May we be excited partners in his continuing mission and rejoice with the lost who are found. Amen.

"THE SPRING HAS COME!"

A poem from New Zealand hymn writer Shirley Murray.

The spring has come,
let all the Church be part of it!
The world has changed
and God is at the heart of it!
New light, new day,
new colour after winter grey,
new light, new day,
the spring has come
let the church be part of it!

The sun is warm,
let all God's children play in it!
The world expands,
Let's spread the gospel way in it!
New leaf, new thrust,
new greening for the love of Christ,
New leaf, new thrust
the sun is warm
let all God's children play in it!

The spring has come,
new people are the flowers of it!
Through wind and rain,
new life is in the showers of it!
New bud, new shoot,
new hope will bear the Spirit's fruit,
new bud, new shoot,
the spring has come,
new people are the flowers of it!

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TiS 179 Praise with joy the world's Creator

Offering and Dedication

When we could not find our way, you came searching for us. So may our gifts be used to bring hope to those cast aside by the world, peace to those whose lives are troubled, and grace to all who are alone. This we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Announcements

Prayers of the People

TiS 613 Lord of all hopefulness, Lord of all joy

Blessing

TiS 781 Father, bless us as we go

