

South Buxton and Talbot Street Pastoral Charges

Fourth Sunday of Lent – March 27th, 2022

Prelude: “Hard Times Come Again No More” by Stephen Foster - by Christie Coatsworth

Welcome & Announcements:

Welcome to Talbot Street today as we celebrate the fourth Sunday of Lent.

The Dale Family is holding a Celebration of Life for JoAn on Sunday May 22nd, at Club Lentina's from 2 to 4 pm. Short Program at 3 pm. Please RSVP to Isabelle at 519-365-5380 by May 8th. We have a list to sign up at each church - which will be forwarded to the family on May 8th.

St. Luke's is hosting their Lenten Fish Fry Take Out on Friday April 8th – pick up from 5 to 6 pm.

Thank you for your support of all our past services, which are posted on our websites – Talbotstreet.ca and Southbuxton.ca

Thank you to our production crew; music by Christie Coatsworth, readings by Annette Skillings and the slides by Tracey Major. You make all the difference. Thank you!

Lighting the Christ Candle:

Call to Worship:

Eric: From far-away places, from close at hand; with hearts troubled, with minds at rest, welcome your people, Holy One.

People: For we come to worship you.

Eric: Carrying heavy loads, travelling light; walking in fear, living in faith, Welcome your people, Holy One.

People: For we come to worship you; with all that is good in our lives, with all that hurts and hinders us, with past and present in us and the future before us. We come to worship you and find our way home.

Eric: Come, let us worship.

Opening Prayer:

People: All along the path with God, we gather, joining the dance, tripping along behind, getting lost at so many turns and twists, then finding a way home again. Our paths cross, intermingle, shift and swirl as life leads us on in the unfolding drama of our own story. If a resting place, if a meeting point, if a fork in the road, whatever be this space and this moment use it, God, to shape and inspire us and grant to us a glimpse of home. Amen.

Opening Hymn: VU 747 “The Lord's My Shepherd”

1 The Lord's my Shepherd, I'll not want;

he makes me down to lie
in pastures green; he leadeth me,
the quiet waters by.

- 2 My soul he doth restore again;
and me to walk doth make
within the paths of righteousness,
even for his own name's sake.
- 3 Yea, though I walk in death's dark vale,
yet will I fear no ill;
for thou art with me; and thy rod
and staff me comfort still.
- 4 My table thou has furnished
in presence of my foes;
my head thou dost with oil anoint,
and my cup overflows.
- 5 Goodness and mercy all my life
shall surely follow me,
and in God's house for evermore
my dwelling-place shall be.

Scripture: Luke 15: 1 – 3, 11 - 32 “Coming Home” -

Lots of tax collectors and people who were labelled as sinners were gathering around Jesus to hear him speak, and the Pharisees and scribes began to grumble that he spent time with and even ate with people who were usually not invited into respectable company.

Jesus sat down. He had already told the people two parables to show that God rejoices now that those who seemed lost, far away from God's family, are being welcomed home. It's not that those who are already in the family are any less valued, he thought to himself, but there is enough room – enough love – for everyone, even those you don't think should ever have a place within the love of God. Jesus wondered, “How can I help you understand... Family... Welcome for the lost...?” Aha!

Jesus looked up and addressed the crowd.

There was a man who had two sons. The younger son decided he didn't want to wait for his father to die for his inheritance, so asked for his share of the property to be given to him immediately. His father, though deeply hurt, gave him his share of the property.

The younger son then took his money and left for a foreign land, where he spent his money unwisely on food and wine and fancy things.

When all his money was gone, this son found himself in the midst of a famine and became desperate. He hired himself out to citizens of this country, who sent him into the fields to feed pigs. He would gladly have eaten the scraps he was feeding the animals.

“Oh,” he cried to himself, “I am so hungry. Even the servants in my father's household eat better than this!”

Then an idea occurred to him. “What if I return home, and say to my father, ‘I have sinned against heaven and you, I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me like one of your hired hands.’ Then I would at least have food to eat and a clean sheltered place to sleep.”

So, he got up and made his way home.

Meanwhile, his father had been keeping an eye out for his lost son, every day, hoping he had not been lost forever. And one day, he was feeling a little more hopeful... He might have been imagining things, but it seemed as though more people than usual were out on the roads and in his fields, watching and waiting for something. Had they heard something he hadn't? Was a Roman legion coming through town?

And then he saw...could it be? Someone walking alone up the path to the house, a little thin perhaps, but yes, it certainly looked like it could be...

The father hitched up his robes, forgetting any sense of respectability, and ran down the path, sweeping his son up into his arms, before his son realized what was happening.

The son tried to speak – “Father, Father – I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son...” but before he could finish, his father was calling to the servants to get him some shoes and a robe, pushing a family ring on his finger, and giving orders for a feast.

“Kill that calf that is fattened up and ready to eat; my son is home! He was dead and is alive again! My son was lost, and now is found! We must celebrate!”

As the older son came in from the fields, he heard the sounds of the celebration and asked a servant what was going on.

“Oh, your father has killed the fatted calf and is celebrating, for your brother has come home!”

But the older son refused to go inside and join the celebrations, forcing his father to leave his guests and come outside to plead with him.

“Listen,” the son cried, “all these years I have worked for you like a slave, never once have you offered me even a goat to celebrate with my friends. And this son of yours comes home, having wasted all your money on immoral living, and you kill a cow?!”

The father sighed and said to his oldest son: “My son, you are always with me, everything I have is yours. But we must rejoice and celebrate that this brother of yours who was dead, has come back to us alive; he was lost, and is found!”

As Jesus finished, he closed his eyes and silently prayed, “God open their hearts so that they might understand.”

Message: “Gracious Love”

Sometimes we just have to distance ourselves from the ones we love. In our teenage years it seems to happen so naturally as we are trying to find our way in the world. Sometimes the ones we love are restricting us too much, that we cannot think for ourselves. We need to break free for a time to find our own way. Is this what happened in today's story? Very likely - we are not really told. We are told that the younger son did not want to wait for his inheritance – which has its own complications in the Jewish culture of Jesus' day. Yet in this story that Jesus shares, the father gives the son his inheritance and the son high tails it to a new land.

Jesus continues the story by saying the young son went off to a foreign land and spent his money on food, wine and fancy things. But we all know the money will not last forever. Nor did it last long for this young man. Soon he was broke, with no money for food or housing. He had to find a job. Being in this foreign land, not everyone will hire you, but a farmer did hire him. The pay was as much food as you could eat and a warm building over your head. But you shared the pig's food and

slept with the pigs. Soon the young man realized that his father's servants are treated better than this, so he heads home ready to tell his father that he will be no longer his son, but his servant.

Jesus tells us that the father had been waiting for his son to return. He kept an eye on the road to welcome him home when he did come back. One day he sees his son way off in the distance and pulls up his robes and runs as fast as he can to welcome his son home. He orders us a great feast for his lost son, puts the family ring on his finger, and gives him shoes and a robe. Can you imagine?

The oldest son could not imagine. He was so angry he refused to join the party. The father comes out to coax him to join them. The eldest son states the obvious – *“I've been here all along and you never even offered a goat to share with my friends. Your son comes home after wasting all your money and you throw him a party with the best beef we have.”*

The father sighs and says, *“My son, you are always with me – everything I have is yours. But we must rejoice as your brother was dead and has come back alive – he was lost and now is found”*. Jesus stops and lets the words sink in to those listening; mainly the Pharisees and scribes who accused Jesus of hanging out with sinners. But also for the sinners to know God welcomes us all home. We are lost, but we are now found.

This passage is one of the greatest parables that Jesus tells and has become a much loved story to all of us. It is a tale for every phase of our life: for our wandering youth, our serious middle age, and our softened old age as we take the part of prodigal, older sibling, and loving parent. It is a story of rebellion and a story of a love that puts us back together in spite of ourselves and that challenges us to live generously among those we might consider family.

There are many main characters in this story, and we can relate to every one of them. When have we been or thought like the younger son? When have we been like the father trying to deal with two difficult sons; one son who wants to live a little - right now; and another son who has made duty and obedience his whole life. Where do we stand in this story?

As Jesus tells the story, the listeners are revealed to us; Pharisees and scribes who are complaining, and a bunch of sinners who need to know God is always with them. They are not alone.

It may seem to us unusual to allow a son to receive his inheritance early, but that is what happens in this story. Sadly the young son found he unable to live up to the responsibilities of his new wealth and status and lost his way out in the world. He sank low enough to feed pigs before he realized that real life was back home with his family – and he became submissive to the point where he would accept the role of a servant in his father’s house. But the young son was instead greeted with a robe to signify the honour with which he was received, a ring to mark his authority within the household, and sandals for his feet to mark him as a son - not a slave or servant. The crowning glory was the celebration – good news for all except doubtless the fatted calf and certainly not for the older brother.

Welcomed and received by the father who had watched and waited for him through anxious days and months, the younger son is referred to as “this son of yours” by his older brother and is thus disowned and discarded in the jealous rage of one who had spent his time working and being dutiful. The father responds, “this brother of yours.”

Jesus presents this story as a challenge to all faithful Jews who have played by the rules, but do not know what to do with their brothers and sisters who have strayed from the straight and narrow, and who have not lived as they have. We are to love them as God loves them, as we see in the father’s response to his younger son. Christian life and faith are not only about just doing the right thing, but is also about being in relationships that have hurt us, yet we offer to put the relationship back together again, and make that relationship sincere and real.

God’s welcome is for everyone. God provides the grace and welcome we need. How might we offer the same to those younger brothers in our lives? Can we forgive them for hurting us? Have we ever received this kind of love and forgiveness in our own lives? Can we as the church offer our community this kind of love and forgiveness? Can we offer those who left our church because of disagreement over theology, biblical interpretation, church doctrine, or maybe who does the flowers? It is not easy. Jesus knows that. God knows that. Jesus also knows we do not do it alone. God is always with us. Thanks be to God.

Reflection Hymn: VU 660 “How Firm a Foundation”

1 How firm a foundation, you servants of God,
is laid for your faith in God's excellent word!
What more can be said than to you has been said,
to you who for refuge to Jesus have fled?

2 'Fear not, I am with you; O be not dismayed!
For I am your God and will still give you aid;
I'll strengthen and help you, and cause you to stand,
upheld by my righteous omnipotent hand.

3 'When through the deep waters I call you to go,
the rivers of sorrow shall not overflow;
for I will be with you, your troubles to bless,
and sanctify to you your deepest distress.

4 'When through fiery trials your pathway shall lie,
my grace, all-sufficient, shall be your supply:
the flame shall not hurt you; I only design
your dross to consume, and your gold to refine.

5 'The soul that on Jesus has leaned for repose
I will not - I will not desert to his foes;
that soul, though all hell should endeavour to shake,
I'll never - no, never - no, never forsake!'

Invitation to Share Our Gifts:

Eric: Remember the words of Jesus who said: "Freely you have received, freely give".

Offertory: VU 541 "Praise God From Whom..."

Praise God from whom all blessings flow;
Praise Him, all creatures here below;
Praise Him above ye heavenly host;
Praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost.

Offertory Prayer:

People: As the prodigal made for home we turn back to you. As the parent celebrated his return we rejoice with all who love you. We are not worthy to receive all that we have, and what we offer is a simple token of all that you have given. So receive us and our offerings as we come with grateful hearts into the love of God: Creator, Redeemer, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Hymn: VU 377 "Holy Spirit, Hear Us"

Holy Spirit, prompt us
when we bow to pray;
speak within and teach us
what we ought to say.

Pastoral Prayer & Lord's Prayer:

Eric: You are always ahead of us, O God. We see the marks on the ground where you have trod.

People: Quickly, all too quickly dust and dirt cover the places you have been.

Eric: But when we look we can find signs that you too travelled here,

People: you too saw the need, heard the cries, were transfixed by the pain of unredeemed loss and unresolved strife.

Eric: You are always ahead of us, O God. We see you walk into the distance, suggesting that we go with you

People: May we have the courage to come after you - to see what you have done: to bind up wounds and heal broken hearts and at the end of the road lead humanity to a parent's arms wide in love that accept all that the journey has been all its false moves and wasted hours warmed away by one embrace that makes all well again.

Eric: You are always ahead of us, O God. You point out the challenges and the needs and laugh at our insistence that we have no gifts,

People: no power, no voice, reminding us what you have given: feet to follow, hands to work, lips to tell how the land and its peoples may be made well.

Eric: O God, go ahead of us, then we will follow:

People: wherever the pain is, wherever there is rumour of conflict, wherever there is famine, wherever the water runs dry, wherever there are no arms to welcome home a son, a daughter, a lost child.

Eric: Let us go and embrace with the fullness of the parent's love;

People: in the power of the Spirit for the sake of you as you walk ahead.

Eric: As we share Jesus' Prayer...

Our Father, Who art in heaven,

Hallowed be thy name, Thy kingdom come,

Thy will be done, On earth as it is in heaven,

Give us this day our daily bread,

And forgive us our trespasses, As we forgive those who trespass against us,

And lead us not into temptation, But deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.

Closing Hymn: VU 135 "Beneath the Cross of Jesus"

- 1 Beneath the cross of Jesus
I fain would take my stand:
the shadow of a mighty rock
within a weary land,
a home within the wilderness,
a rest upon the way,
from the burning of the noontide heat
and the burden of the day.
- 2 Upon the cross of Jesus
my eyes at times can see
the very dying form of one
who suffered there for me;
and from my smitten heart, with tears,
two wonders I confess,
the wonder of his glorious love,

and my unworthiness.

- 3 I take, O cross, your shadow
for my abiding place;
I ask no other sunshine than
the sunshine of his face,
content to let the world go by,
to know no gain nor loss,
my sinful self my only shame,
my glory all, the cross.

Blessing:

Eric: Go into the world in peace and in joy to journey again with God. The blessing of God the Creator, the Redeemer, and the Holy Spirit be yours, now and forever more.

May the Blessing of God Be Upon You: VU 429

May the blessing of God be upon you.
May God's love light all your way.
May the grace of Christ enfold you
and peace around you stay.
May the Spirit of God dwell within you.
May you live in joy each day.

Amen, Amen, Amen.

Postlude: "From a Distance" – Christie Coatsworth

Prayers: - Please include these people in your prayers this week.

We have offered prayer for these people each Sunday morning just before the Zoom Service. It was suggested to share these names with the total group – as "In the Spirit We Are One".

Cancer:	Tom	
	Louise	Louise' Granddaughter - Blake
	Betty	Ingrid
	Alison	Brenda
	Nancy	Lisa
	Sarah	Larry
	Brian	Jack
	Zoe	Becky
	Barry/ Marsha	Francine
	Melissa	Karen
	Jenny	Michelle
	Heather	Ross
	Margaret	Dolly
	Chris	Ukraine – Canadian and Allied Forces
	Michelle	Glenna
	Ann	