

# **SA, SL, TS & DSM United Churches**

## ***Fourth Sunday of Lent – March 30<sup>th</sup>, 2025***

**Prelude:** - by Christie Coatsworth

### **Welcome & Announcements:**

Thank you for your support of all our past services, which are posted on our websites - [Talbotstreet.ca](http://Talbotstreet.ca) and [Southbuxton.ca](http://Southbuxton.ca)

### **Lighting the Christ Candle:**

#### **Call to Worship:**

**Eric:** When we struggle to live as you teach us, and we fail to answer your call... God, your steadfast loves surrounds us.

**People:** When the truth clogs up in our throat, and we fear what will happen if we speak and if we keep silent... **God, your steadfast love surrounds us.**

**Eric:** When we open our hearts and let the truth of our sorrows, our sin, our joys, and our doubts flow freely... God, your steadfast love surrounds us.

**People:** When our stubborn hearts encounter the grace that teaches and guides us into a life of trust and joyful obedience... **God, your steadfast love surrounds us today and every day.**

**Eric:** Thanks be to God!

**People:** Amen. \*\*

#### **Opening Hymn: VU 333 “Love Divine, All Loves Excelling”**

Love divine, all loves excelling,  
joy of heaven to earth come down,  
fix in us thy humble dwelling,  
all thy faithful mercies crown.  
Jesus, thou art all compassion,  
pure, unbounded love thou art;  
visit us with thy salvation,  
enter every trembling heart.

Come, almighty to deliver;  
let us all thy grace receive;  
suddenly return, and never,  
nevermore thy temples leave.  
Thee we would be always blessing,  
serve thee as thy hosts above,  
pray, and praise thee, without ceasing,  
glory in thy perfect love.

Finish, then, thy new creation;

pure and spotless let us be;  
let us see thy great salvation  
perfectly restored in thee,  
changed from glory into glory,  
till in heaven we take our place,  
till we cast our crowns before thee,  
lost in wonder, love, and praise. \*\*

### **Opening Prayer:**

**People:** Loving God, it was said of the Prodigal Son that he “came to himself.” Help us to wake up to ourselves, and to you. Set us free from the illusion of trying to be perfect so that we might be more fully human. Help us not to chase after an imaginary life, and to find satisfaction in our real lives. And turn us away from our self-rejection so that we might notice your arms open in welcome. Amen. \*\*

### **Responsive Psalm: Psalm 32**

#### ***The Joy of Forgiveness***

Our Lord, you bless everyone whose sins you forgive and wipe away.

**You bless them by saying, “You told me your sins, without trying to hide them, and now I forgive you.”**

Before I confessed my sins, my bones felt limp, and I groaned all day long.

**Night and day your hand weighed heavily on me, and my strength was gone as in the summer heat.**

So I confessed my sins and told them all to you. I said, “I’ll tell the Lord each one of my sins.” Then you forgave me and took away my guilt.

**We worship you, Lord, and we should always pray whenever we find out that we have sinned.** Then we won’t be swept away by a raging flood.

**You are my hiding place! You protect me from trouble, and you put songs in my heart because you have saved me.**

You said to me, “I will point out the road that you should follow. I will be your teacher and watch over you.

**Don’t be stupid like horses and mules that must be led with ropes to make them obey.”**

All kinds of troubles will strike the wicked, but your kindness shields those who trust you, Lord.

**And so your good people should celebrate and shout. \*\***

### **Children’s Story:**

### **Children’s Song: VU 365 “Jesus Loves Me”**

Jesus loves me, this I know,  
for the Bible tells me so;  
little ones to him belong,  
in his love we shall be strong.

*Yes, Jesus loves me! Yes, Jesus loves me!*

*Yes, Jesus loves me! The Bible tells me so.*

Jesus loves me, this I know,

as he loved so long ago,  
taking children on his knee,  
saying, 'Let them come to me.'

*Yes, Jesus loves me! Yes, Jesus loves me!*  
*Yes, Jesus loves me! The Bible tells me so.*

Jesus loves me still today,  
walking with me on my way,  
wanting as a friend to give  
light and love to all who live.

*Yes, Jesus loves me! Yes, Jesus loves me!*  
*Yes, Jesus loves me! The Bible tells me so. \*\**

### **Gospel Reading: Luke 15: 1 – 3, 11 - 32**

Tax collectors and sinners were all crowding around to listen to Jesus. So the Pharisees and the teachers of the Law of Moses started grumbling, "This man is friendly with sinners. He even eats with them." Then Jesus told them this story:

Once a man had two sons. The younger son said to his father, "Give me my share of the property." So the father divided his property between his two sons. Not long after that, the younger son packed up everything he owned and left for a foreign country, where he wasted all his money in wild living. He had spent everything, when a bad famine spread through that whole land. Soon he had nothing to eat. He went to work for a man in that country, and the man sent him out to take care of his pigs. He would have been glad to eat what the pigs were eating, but no one gave him a thing. Finally, he came to his senses and said, "My father's workers have plenty to eat, and here I am, starving to death! I will go to my father and say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against God in heaven and against you. I am no longer good enough to be called your son. Treat me like one of your workers.' " The younger son got up and started back to his father. But when he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt sorry for him. He ran to his son and hugged and kissed him. The son said, "Father, I have sinned against God in heaven and against you. I am no longer good enough to be called your son." But his father said to the servants, "Hurry and bring the best clothes and put them on him. Give him a ring for his finger and sandals for his feet. Get the best calf and prepare it, so we can eat and celebrate. This son of mine was dead, but has now come back to life. He was lost and has now been found." And they began to celebrate. The older son had been out in the field. But when he came near the house, he heard the music and dancing. So he called one of the servants over and asked, "What's going on here?" The servant answered, "Your brother has come home safe and sound, and your father ordered us to kill the best calf." The older brother got so angry that he would not even go into the house. His father came out and begged him to go in. But he said to his father, "For years I have worked for you like a slave and have always obeyed you. But you have never even given me a little goat, so that I could give a dinner for my friends. This other son of yours wasted your money on prostitutes. And now that he has come home, you ordered the best calf to be killed for a feast." His father replied, "My son, you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. But we should be glad and celebrate! Your brother was dead, but he is now alive. He was lost and has now been found." \*\*

### **Message: "Steadfast Love"**

Jesus was asked for the single law, the one most important. He gave two: Love God; love neighbor. They are woven together, Jesus implied. The relationships that connect us to each other and to God are the same relationship. If we are not in relationship with God, we are not in a good relationship with each other. Vice versa – if we are not in good relationship with each other we are not in good relationship with God. Just look at the two brothers. One is remorseful, and comes back home. The older brother has never left home, and is furious when his bratty little brother shows up, and his father throws a party.

Even as the father talks to the older brother to share with him about the fact his sibling is alive – his pleas fall on deaf ears. The older brother is not in relationship with anyone at this point of time. Nor is he in any relationship with God. His brother can go to hell, as far as he is concerned. Anger takes the brother out of relationship with his father and with the younger brother,

Yet the father is all about keeping relationships alive and well. The father has welcomed his youngest son back into the family, in a way that we wish God will welcome us – no questions asked – “Come on in!”

How might we stay or get back into community – with God and with one another? Prayer for the community, then step into the community. Don’t wait for someone else to take the first step. God wants us to take that first step.

If you want, you can live in the agony of brokenness and stubbornness. But that is no way to live. You will be all alone. You will be without community and without God.

The younger son found out exactly that. He was all alone. No community to gather with – after all he was broke. It’s amazing how the community leaves when you can no longer wine and dine them. In that loneliness, the young man came to the realization that something got in the way of his dream of a better life. He wakes up to reality, standing in a pig pen up to his knees in pig fertilizer. Many times we need to hit bottom to realize this is not the way to live. Lucky for him, he had another option. He could reach out to his community, to his family – although it is that same family he slapped in the face when the young whipper-snapper thought he knew it all.

When he comes to the realization that life was better right where he had been born, raised and valued. The young man knew he wasn't worthy. He even rehearsed a speech he would share. I can imagine on that long walk home, the young man rehearsing the speech over and over again, crafting the words to sound remorseful, yet loving. The young man knew he didn't deserve all the love that his father showered on him. But that is exactly what happened. The father ran out to the road, and threw his arms around his son, and welcomed him home. "My son was dead, but now is alive". When you think about that phrase, the son is alive in more ways than one. He is alive now to his father and community. The son is also alive to himself and can once again build a relationship with God. The father has shown him how.

What about the older brother? The brother that stayed home and worked daily for his father? The brother who was responsible, hard working and keep up the income stream for the family. He knew his younger bratty brother didn't deserve the love and care shown by his father - that's for sure. Here he was staying around the farm working and building the family fortune. And oh my God, his father gives it away once again to his younger brother who did not deserve it?

Do we deserve it? Do we deserve the love of this young man's father? As Christians we have that love every day, until we start taking it for granted. Maybe that is why we celebrate Holy Week every year. To be reminded of the love God shows to his children by sending his Son to die for our sins. It is a gruesome story. Yes it is the greatest story ever of love.

We too like the younger son, have God's steadfast love surrounding us. Then in time we take it for granted – we turn away – maybe even run away. Like in those times we only think of ourselves and our immediate pleasures. Yet when we come home, there was something powerful, transformative, even eternal that surrounds us, even though we don't deserve it. That is what we call God's Grace!

God's Grace will meet us at the end of the laneway, throw it's graceful arms around us, and welcome us home. Our God will tell the angels to prepare the feast for us, because the lost has returned home. We are the luckiest people in the world to live in relationship with God.

But what about the older brother? He has always lived in that relationship. But has the older brother taken that relationship for granted. You see, now he is the son

that is self centred – thinking only of himself and his immediate pleasures. He is the mule-headed son – defying his father the pleasure of enjoying his lost son, who is now found.

One relationship is restored, and they shout for joy. They laugh again. They are secure in the steadfast love that surrounds them. I wonder how long it takes the older brother to be found once again? We are not alone. God is always with us. Thanks be to God.

**Reflection Hymn: VU 271 “There is a Wideness in God’s Mercy”**

There's a wideness in God's mercy  
like the wideness of the sea;  
there's a kindness in God's justice  
which is more than liberty.

There is no place where earth's sorrows  
are more felt than up in heaven;  
there is no place where earth's failings  
have such gracious judgement given.

There is plentiful redemption  
in the blood that Christ has shed;  
there is joy for all the members  
in the sorrows of the Head.

Troubled souls, why will you scatter  
like a crowd of frightened sheep?  
Foolish hearts, why will you wander  
from a love so true and deep?

For the love of God is broader  
than the measures of the mind,  
and the heart of the Eternal  
is most wonderfully kind.

**Invitation to Share Our Gifts:**

**Eric:** We offer our gifts so others can also feel your grace. Let us give to share our love with others.

**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:** Gracious God, our refuge and restorer, we bring these gifts as a sign of our return to you. Like the prodigal, we long to feel your embrace and live in the light of your grace. As we observe this holy time of Lent, may our offerings reflect hearts that are turning back to you. Clear the clogs in our lives that separate us from you and one another and help us see the rainbow of your promise even in our struggles. Bless these gifts and our lives so that we may share your steadfast love with the world. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen. \*\*

**Hymn: VU 400 "Listen To Your Children Praying"**

Lord, listen to your children praying,  
Lord, send your Spirit in this place;  
Lord, listen to your children praying,  
send us love, send us power, send us grace!

**Pastoral Prayer & Lord's Prayer:**

**Closing Hymn: VU 331 "The Church's One Foundation"**

The church's one foundation is Jesus Christ our Lord;  
we are his new creation by water and the Word;  
from heaven he came and sought us that we might ever be  
his living servant people, by his own death set free.

Called forth from every nation, yet one o'er all the earth;  
one charter of salvation: one Lord, one faith, one birth.  
One holy name professing and at one table fed,  
to one hope always pressing, by Christ's own Spirit led.

Though with a scornful wonder the world sees us oppressed,  
by schisms rent asunder, by heresies distressed,  
yet saints their watch are keeping; their cry goes up, 'How long?'  
But soon the night of weeping shall be the morn of song.

Mid toil and tribulation, and tumult of our war,  
we wait the consummation of peace forevermore;  
till with the vision glorious our longing eyes are blest,  
and the great church victorious shall be the church at rest.

We now on earth have union with God the Three in One,  
and share through faith communion with those whose rest is won.  
Oh, happy ones, and holy! Lord, give us grace that we  
like them, the meek and lowly, on high may dwell with thee. \*\*

**Blessing:**

**Eric:** May God's grace go ahead of you, trail behind you, and encircle you each and every moment, that with every move you make you would know with absolute assurance that God's steadfast love will never leave you alone, now and forever more.

**Chorus: VU 365    Chorus**

*Yes, Jesus loves me! Yes, Jesus loves me!*  
*Yes, Jesus loves me! The Bible tells me so.*

**Amen, Amen, Amen.**

**Postlude:** – Christie Coatsworth