

# ORMOND UNITING CHURCH



30TH MARCH 2025

LENT 4C



**BODY** WEEK THREE, DAY TWELVE

## broken

I took all my broken  
to the river  
and met you on the grass  
and you had brought  
your load  
of broken too  
and we sat and shared  
a silence for two

two's company when  
there is more than plenty  
of broken

and the river  
listened and ran  
deep, muddy and wide  
impeccably polite

leafy light bounced  
from ripples pulsing  
snaking up the trunk  
of a sentient eucalypt

while words took flight  
like ducks  
water walking before lift off  
miraculous and impossible  
settling into stillness in the centre  
still broken  
broken stillness  
broken still

and somehow in the sitting  
the broken became less  
of a burden  
and more of a door

and we walked through  
together



Day is done a Lenten journey [https://bit.ly/Day\\_is\\_Done](https://bit.ly/Day_is_Done)

Words and Images Rev. Jennie Gordon 2024

# WORSHIP AT HOME

*This time is an opportunity to be still, seeking to be aware of the presence of God within.*

*Carve out a time for this practice; prepare yourself, as you might for a usual Sunday morning and remember that there are others from the congregation gathering at the same time as you. There are also many from the church around the globe who are gathering to seek the presence of God as we are.*

*Prepare a space in the house; find a comfortable chair, light a candle, turn off distracting noises and close the door if that will help you to be still. This is something that does not need to be hurried.*

## GATHERING PRAYER.

**From PSALM 32** (a version for today)

A real sense of contentment comes to the person  
from whom the burden of rebellion against the compassionate One  
has been lifted,

**whom the Holy One has acquitted.**

I kept silent;  
I hoped it would all go away;

**but my body grew old before its time,  
as I struggled with the load I carried.**

Day and night, day and night,

**and my tongue was hard and cracked,  
like a drought-baked paddock.**

But then I came to my senses,  
**and admitted that I could not blot out my wrongs.**

I said, "I will confess my rebellion to the LORD",  
**and then you lifted its weight from me.**

Our following in the way of Jesus is flawed  
**yet still we are assured of the liberating embrace  
of your lovingkindness. Amen**

( Jeff Shrowder – The Billabong )

## Call to Worship: Luke 15: 20

"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."

# Prayer for today

Holy God, Word Shaper:  
you are not our accountant,  
but our lover;  
you are not angry at us,  
but you forgive us;  
you are not our enemy,  
but the One who runs towards us  
with wide open arms,  
throwing steaks on the grill  
to celebrate our newness!

Jesus Christ, Shaper of our story:  
you travel to that distant country called our sin  
to bring us home once again;  
you share your inheritance with us  
so we might be blessed;  
you know the famine of our spirits  
and fill it with your hope.

Holy Spirit, Life Shaper:  
surrounded by your grace,  
we offer glad cries of salvation;  
encircled by your constant love,  
we shout for joy;  
enclosed in your comforting arms,  
nothing can overwhelm us.

God in Community, Holy in One,  
from now on we will remember our life in you,  
loved by your gracious gift of Jesus Christ, our Redeemer.

## **Confession**

In each of our hearts is a locked place, God;  
Like a forgotten room or a dark cupboard,  
We would prefer to forget it even exists,  
But inside it are things that won't stay hidden.

Others would never suspect that we carry such a place;  
We guard our faces so no evidence appears,  
And we keep our lips sealed,  
allowing no escape for the stories of the skeletons in our cupboard.

But in the quiet moments, the unguarded times of solitude,  
The doors we struggle to hold shut fly open  
and the skeletons – these living guilts – come out and dance  
Mocking us and reminding us of our secret shame.

Free us from the power and the prison  
of the skeletons in our cupboards, Jesus;

Teach us that mistakes, brokenness and failure  
are part of creative and bold living  
Remind us that what is hidden holds us in bondage  
and cannot be healed;  
And lead us through our shame to confident joy in You.  
Let us know the touch of your forgiveness and healing.

### **Assurance of Forgiveness**

God rolls away everything that stands in our way - our past, our sin, our pain, our hesitation, and reshapes us into new people living in the new creation. What wonderful grace. We are forgiven!

**Broken, we are made whole;  
lost, we are brought home;  
empty, we are filled with songs of gladness.  
We rejoice and give thanks to God who has graced us with mercy. Amen.**

( Thom Shuman & Sacredise)

## **Scripture** – Read by Mardie Townsend

Luke 15:1-3,11-32

<sup>5</sup> Now the tax collectors and sinners were all gathering around to hear Jesus. <sup>2</sup> But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, “This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.”

<sup>3</sup> Then Jesus told them this parable:

<sup>11</sup> Jesus continued: “There was a man who had two sons. <sup>12</sup> The younger one said to his father, ‘Father, give me my share of the estate.’ So he divided his property between them.

<sup>13</sup> “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. <sup>14</sup> After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. <sup>15</sup> So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. <sup>16</sup> He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything.

<sup>17</sup> “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! <sup>18</sup> I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. <sup>19</sup> I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired servants.’ <sup>20</sup> 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.

<sup>21</sup> “The son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’

<sup>22</sup> “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. <sup>23</sup> Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let’s have a feast and celebrate. <sup>24</sup> For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’ So they began to celebrate.

<sup>25</sup> “Meanwhile, the older son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. <sup>26</sup> So he called one of the servants and asked him what was going on. <sup>27</sup> ‘Your brother has

come,' he replied, 'and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.'

<sup>28</sup> "The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him. <sup>29</sup> 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. <sup>30</sup> But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!'

<sup>31</sup> "'My son,' the father said, 'you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. <sup>32</sup> 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.'"

## Reflection - The Loving Father - Warwick Barry

Our gospel story is one of the most well-known and familiar stories, I suspect it is almost as well known as the parable of the good Samaritan, outside of the church, even in an increasingly secular world. All of us are part of a family, or we know families that may well experience family dysfunction, conflict, difficult adults and loss of relationship in various ways.

But therein lies the problem for us as Christians, because we can come to the parable with our own perspectives that lock us in to a particular mindset or a closed heart to what we hear or read. Lent offers us the opportunity to reflect on our lives with a contemplative perspective, in the light of Jesus' death and resurrection. We reflect on our own human brokenness, and our need of God's redemption, like the psalmist in Psalm 32, and in a real way, Lent may help us see the 'lostness' of the key characters in the story.

The title given to this parable is not that helpful, for the Prodigal Son, is a reckless, extravagant, living son, who 'goes off the grid' and leaves an indulgent life. But clearly, when we consider the story, both sons are somewhat lost in different ways, even the older son who is considered good. From my perspective, Jesus is at pains in the readings opening verses, to point out to the Pharisees and scribes, that in many and varied ways everyone is lost, but more importantly Jesus is challenging their view of God as judgemental; rather we should understand God as the eager, compassionate and loving God of the lost, not of those who consider themselves good. A trap we ourselves may well fall into. Rather than the two lost sons, maybe this parable should be called the parable of The Loving Father.

The religious beliefs of the time were closed to the idea that a holy person might actually enjoy the company of people they didn't like, appreciate or who they condemned. As Melissa Bane Sevier said, "Jesus challenges those who consider themselves the insiders of faith, and in this story shows them on the outside looking in," like the older son, closed to forgiveness and reconciliation.

Like most Hebrew stories in the Bible we are given only the barest details of what happened and only some insight into what the characters said and did. Dare I suggest that we may identify with both characters at times, for different reasons. Different forms of 'lostness' include a broad range of things, such as pride, greed, anger, envy, lust and apathy, along with resentments. Selfish actions can also lead us to attitudes and behaviours on our own part, that are destructive to others well-being and are far from grace filled. We are as people always a mix of strength and weaknesses, beauty and brokenness.

So I'm going to share a few excerpts from a biblical commentator, Debbie Thomas, who writes for the webzine *Journey with Jesus*, who wrote two letters to both sons, exploring her heartfelt feelings about their actions and attitudes. I hope it may help us all to enter into the characters and parable in a different way and to help open our hearts to God's heart for us and the lifelong process of forgiveness and grace we yearn for and need.

**To the boy who ran:** I begin with you because you're the strangest and least accessible to me. Impetuous. Careless. Demanding. So selfish, you take my breath away.

On the face of things you and I have nothing in common. I've never run away, or squandered an inheritance, or broken my parents' hearts. Neither have I felt the ardent, tear-soaked embrace of a lovesick, father – human, or divine – welcoming me home.

Maybe this is why I dislike you. Am I envious because God is generous? Am I hurt because the father's love is a wild unfettered thing, unpredictable, and unfair? Yes, I am. YES I AM.

I wish I knew for sure that your penitence was genuine. I wish I had a guarantee that you understood – not just in your head but with your whole heart – just how much fear, destruction, and sorrow you caused. I am okay with forgiving you but only if you're sorry beyond language. Only if you bleed repentance.

This is a problem, of course, my lack of charity. I want to accuse you of having no empathy – I've not giving a damn about how you ripped your father's heart out of his chest, but here I am, completely uninterested in empathising with you. So I'm digging down trying extra hard to reach you. Who are you beneath the labels? Beneath prodigal, beneath sinner, beneath poster boy for God's great kindness? I grew up in the church, a quiet, good kid in my father's shadow. I don't have a dramatic conversion story like yours. What could you possibly have to teach me?

Aren't you at the very core the hungry one?

It was hunger wasn't it, that first lured you away from the good life and a good father? A gluttonous hunger maybe but hunger still. For freedom? Self-expression? Meaning? Peace? Something in you, something wild and insistent needing feeding and your father in his vast, and orthodox wisdom understood.

Your journey ends in a passionate embrace. Unrestrained welcome, overflowing joy. Were you grateful? I will never know. It seems your father didn't much care; he just wanted to feed and clothe you. There's so little of your experience I can relate to, much less applaud. To feel ourselves, loved is one thing, but to be embraced is another.

But at least you and I have this in common I know what it's like to hunger. To hunger for love, for depth, for passion and joy. And I know what it's like to imagine an exotic Elsewhere, a more perfect nourishment miles away from my father's all too familiar table. I know what it's like to come to myself in the broken, impoverished places of my own foolish, fashioning, and long for the warmth and sustenance of a home.

I don't like you. But maybe we're not so very different after all.

**To the boy who stayed:** I won't lie; my sympathies lie most naturally with you. Your story haunts me. Your resentments mirror, mine. Whenever I think of you standing, appalled, outside your father's house, your brother's easy laughter, ringing in your ears, my heart breaks. I see you sore and sweat stained after a day in the fields. Longing to go inside for a shower, a meal, a bed. Longing for so many legitimate things, only to be thwarted by a song and dance that grate on the ear. A robe, a ring, and a fattened calf, not intended for you.

Theologians tell me I'm supposed to look at you and see self-righteousness, arrogance, and unholy spite. But I don't, I look at you and see pain. I am an oldest kid too. Used to being responsible, staying home, and getting things done, by temperament. I'm careful, I like order, and I don't mind work. But I'm a stickler about fairness, I care about fairness a lot.

I am also to be fair, a seether. I don't confront, I seethe, just like you. Tell me, how long did the bitterness fester? How many weeks, months or years did you suffer in silence mistaking restraint for righteousness? Did your father shrink as your anger grew? Did every word he spoke, every request he made, every sigh feel like daggers?

I don't know why your father never gave you a young goat or threw you and your friends a spontaneous party. I wish with all my heart he had, it makes me angry that he didn't. Was he waiting for you to ask? Were you in turn waiting for him to initiate?

"We have to celebrate and rejoice." This is your father's final word to you, as you stand out in the cold, your arms crossed, your fists clenched, your heart bleeding. Did you know, dutiful first born? Did you know you have to celebrate? Did you know that joy is a must in your father's house? That partying is a duty?

How astonishing that you lived within arms, reach of your father all these years, and never glimpsed, the merriment that is at his core. "We have to celebrate and rejoice," he insists. But there you stand you lover of justice, 100% right and 100% alone. What will it take for you to believe this craziness? Some lessons can only be learned in the thick of laughter. Some hearts will only be healed at the Feast.

But here is your vindication, the power in the story is yours, your brother's inside, and your father stands in the doorway, awaiting your company. You get to write the ending!

What will you do, as the music grows sweeter?

Our loving God waits for us with open arms, looking from afar, ever expectant, that our moments of lostness will enable us to turn home, again and again, in the course of our life's journey. God never gives up, never abandons, never condemns, rather he celebrates our return.

Grace is greater than sin, love never ends and welcomes every lost child home. What will we choose, you and I, in the times when we stand "outside the door of our Father's home", will our hearts be open or closed?

**Amen**

## Prayers of the people – prepared by Marg Davis

*As we prepare for our prayers for others, we light this candle to remember all those who are part of our church community, but who are not at worship with us today.*

*Light the candle*

**Welcoming and loving God** we bring our prayers for others to you today. **Let us pray**

Dear Lord, there is so much to be grateful for and yet so many are struggling throughout the world, here in Australia and within our own community. We pray for those in authority that they may act with fairness and empathy, so that the gap between the 'haves' and the 'have nots' does not continue to expand.

We pray for the world-wide church and all its leaders. Help them to bring justice for the lost and the broken.

Compassionate God, we ask that you bring healing and peace to all who are sad, lonely or sick and to families who are divided. Bless all who provide care and support.

Caring Lord, we pray for our families and friends, our neighbours, colleagues and ourselves. Help us to love and care for one another as you have loved us.

Loving God, be with us and give us courage to respond to your call

These prayers we bring to you as we say the prayer that you 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 forever. Amen**

## Blessing

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.     **Amen.**

(Written by Dr. Lisa Hancock UMC)

## Postlude

*You can find a copy of today's sermon along with other congregational information on the church website.*

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Music: Karen Roberts

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## NEWS & NOTICES