

The Fourth Sunday in Lent - March 30, 2025

Call to Worship

We have been given a ministry of reconciliation and sharing.

God reconciled us to God's self through the witness of Jesus Christ.

No longer do we need to fear.

Hope has been given to us.

So we are now ambassadors for Christ. God is making God's appeal to all humankind through us - in all that we say, think and do.

Praise be to God who has placed God's trust in us.

We will strive to serve God faithfully.

[Ministry Matters™ | Worship Connection: March 30, 2025](#)

Hymn

Love divine, all loves excelling

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1. 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.
2. Breathe, oh breathe thy loving Spirit
into every troubled breast.
Let us all in thee inherit,
let us find the promised rest;
take away the love of sinning;
Alpha and Omega be.
End of faith, as its beginning,
set our hearts at liberty.
3. Come, almighty, to deliver,
let us all thy grace receive.
Suddenly return, and never,
nevermore they 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.
4. 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.

"Love divine, all loves excelling." Words by Charles Wesley. Public domain.

Prayers of Adoration and Confession

God of Mystery and Mercy,

we gather to worship in humility and hope because we trust

you have the power to change the world for the better with your love.

We gather to worship you,

trusting that no person or situation is beyond your concern, or your embrace.

Inspire us with a vision of love that will change the world and our lives

through the love and mercy we meet in Jesus Christ, your Son and our Saviour.

**God of love and mercy,
when we pause for a moment in your presence,
the daily details of our lives press in on us.
We recall things left undone, opportunities ignored.
We remember careless words spoken, disappointments that trouble our souls.
In silence we offer to you our misspent moments and missed opportunities:**

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Almighty God, by your Holy Spirit
open our minds and bodies to the re-creating power of your Word,
that we may see the world through the mind of Christ
and live in the world as a foretaste of your new creation.
In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Feasting on the Word Worship Companion: Liturgies for Year C, Volume 1 © 2012 Westminster John Knox Press.P120.

Assurance of Forgiveness

Remember the promise that the apostle Paul declares:
What can separate us from the love of Christ? Hardship? Distress? Peril or sword?
No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through the God who loves us.
Neither death nor life, things present nor things to come can separate us
from the love of God in Christ Jesus.
Thanks be to God for such a promise!
The peace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with us all.

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Scripture Reading Luke 15:1-3, 11b-32

¹⁻³ By this time a lot of men and women of questionable reputation were hanging around Jesus, listening intently. The Pharisees and religion scholars were not pleased, not at all pleased. They growled, "He takes in sinners and eats meals with them, treating them like old friends." Their grumbling triggered this story...

¹¹⁻¹² Then he said, "There was once a man who had two sons. The younger said to his father, 'Father, I want right now what's coming to me.'

¹²⁻¹⁶ "So the father divided the property between them. It wasn't long before the younger son packed his bags and left for a distant country. There, undisciplined and dissipated, he wasted everything he had. After he had gone through all his money, there was a bad famine all through that country and he began to feel it. He signed on with a citizen there who assigned him to his fields to slop the pigs. He was so hungry he would have eaten the corn-cobs in the pig slop, but no one would give him any.

¹⁷⁻²⁰ "That brought him to his senses. He said, 'All those farmhands working for my father sit down to three meals a day, and here I am starving to death. I'm going back to my father. I'll say to him, Father, I've sinned against God, I've sinned before you; I don't deserve to be called your son. Take me on as a hired hand.' He got right up and went home to his father.

20-21 “When he was still a long way off, his father saw him. His heart pounding, he ran out, embraced him, and kissed him. The son started his speech: ‘Father, I’ve sinned against God, I’ve sinned before you; I don’t deserve to be called your son ever again.’

22-24 “But the father wasn’t listening. He was calling to the servants, ‘Quick. Bring a clean set of clothes and dress him. Put the family ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Then get a prize-winning heifer and roast it. We’re going to feast! We’re going to have a wonderful time! My son is here—given up for dead and now alive! Given up for lost and now found!’ And they began to have a wonderful time.

25-27 “All this time his older son was out in the field. When the day’s work was done he came in. As he approached the house, he heard the music and dancing. Calling over one of the houseboys, he asked what was going on. He told him, ‘Your brother came home. Your father has ordered a feast—barbecued beef!—because he has him home safe and sound.’

28-30 “The older brother stomped off in an angry sulk and refused to join in. His father came out and tried to talk to him, but he wouldn’t listen. The son said, ‘Look how many years I’ve stayed here serving you, never giving you one moment of grief, but have you ever thrown a party for me and my friends? Then this son of yours who has thrown away your money on whores shows up and you go all out with a feast!’

31-32 “His father said, ‘Son, you don’t understand. You’re with me all the time, and everything that is mine is yours—but this is a wonderful time, and we had to celebrate. This brother of yours was dead, and he’s alive! He was lost, and he’s found!’”

[The Message](#) (MSG) Copyright © 1993, 2002, 2018 by [Eugene H. Peterson](#)

Message Celebrate Good Times

Philip Yancey, in his award-winning book, [What’s So Amazing About Grace](#), tells the story of the younger lost son in modern context.

A young girl grows up on a cherry orchard just above Traverse City, Michigan. Her parents, a bit old-fashioned, tend to overreact to her nose ring, the music she listens to, and the length of her skirts. They ground her a few times, and she seethes inside. “*I hate you!*” She screams at her father when he knocks on the door of her room after an argument, and that night she acts on a plan she has mentally rehearsed scores of times. She runs away.

She has visited Detroit only once before, on a bus trip with her church youth group to watch the *Tigers* play. Because newspapers in Traverse City report in lurid details the gangs, the drugs, and the violence in downtown Detroit, she concludes that is probably the last place her parents will look for her. California, maybe, or Florida, but not Detroit.

Her second day there she meets a man who drives the biggest car she’s ever seen. He offers her a ride, buys her lunch, and arranges a place for her to stay. He gives her some pills that make her feel better than she’s ever felt

before. She was right all along, she decides: her parents were keeping her from all the fun.

The good life continues for a month, two months, a year. The man with the big car – she calls him “Boss” – teaches her a few things that men like. Since she’s underage, men pay a premium for her. She lives in a penthouse, and orders room service whenever she wants. Occasionally she thinks about the folks back home, but their lives now seem so boring and provincial that she can hardly believe she grew up there.

She has a brief scare when she sees her picture printed on a flier with the headline, *“Have you seen this child?”* But by now she has blond hair, and with all the makeup and body-piercing jewelry she wears, nobody would mistake her for a child. Besides, most of her friends are runaways, and nobody squeals in Detroit.

After a year the first sallow signs of illness appear, and it amazes her how fast the boss turns mean. And before she knows it she’s out on the street without a penny to her name. She still turns a couple of tricks a night, but they don’t pay much, and all the money goes to support her habit. When winter blows in she finds herself sleeping on metal grates outside the big department stores. “Sleeping” is the wrong word – a teenage girl at night in downtown Detroit can never relax her guard. Dark bands circle her eyes. Her cough worsens.

One night as she lies awake listening for footsteps, all of a sudden everything about her life looks different. She no longer feels like a woman of the world. She feels like a little girl, lost in a cold and frightening city. She begins to whimper. Her pockets are empty and she’s hungry. She needs a fix. She pulls her legs tight underneath her and shivers under the newspapers she’s piled atop her coat. Something jolts a synapse of memory and a single image fills her mind: of May in Traverse City, when a million cherry trees bloom at once, with her golden retriever dashing through the rows and rows of blossomy trees in chase of a tennis ball.

“God, why did I leave,” she says to herself, and pain stabs at her heart. *“My dog back home eats better than I do now.”* She’s sobbing, and she knows in a flash that more than anything else in the world she wants to go home.

Three straight phone calls – three straight connections to voicemail. She hangs up without leaving a message the first two times, but the third time she says, *“Dad, Mom, it’s me. I was wondering about maybe coming home. I’m catching a bus up your way, and it’ll get there about midnight tomorrow. If you’re not there, well, I guess I’ll just stay on the bus until it hits Canada.”*

It takes about seven hours for a bus to make all the stops between Detroit and Traverse City, and during that time she realizes the flaws in her plan. What if her parents are out of town and miss the message? Shouldn't she have waited another day or so until she could talk to them? And even if they are home, they probably wrote her off as dead long ago. She should have given them some time to overcome the shock.

Her thoughts bounce back and forth between those worries and the speech she is preparing for her father: *"Dad, I'm sorry. I know I was wrong. It's not your fault; it's all mine. Dad, can you forgive me?"* She says the words over and over, her throat tightening even as she rehearses them. She hasn't apologized to anyone in years.

The bus has been driving with lights on since Bay City. Tiny snow flakes hit the pavement rubbed worn by thousands of tires, and the asphalt steams. She's forgotten how dark it gets at night out here. A deer darts across the road and the bus swerves. Every so often, a billboard. A sign posting the mileage to Traverse City. *"Oh God."*

When the bus finally rolls into the station, its air brakes hissing in protest, the driver announces in a crackly voice over the microphone, *"Fifteen minutes, folks. That's all we have here."* Fifteen minutes to decide her life. She checks herself in a compact mirror and smooths her hair. She looks at the tobacco stains on her fingertips, and wonders if her parents will notice. If they're there.

She walks into the terminal not knowing what to expect. Not one of the thousand scenes that have played out in her mind prepares her for what she sees. There, in the concrete-walls-and-plastic-chairs bus terminal in Traverse City, Michigan, stands a group of forty brothers and sisters and great-aunts and uncles and cousins and even her grandmother. And taped across the entire wall of the terminal is a banner that reads, *"Welcome Home!"*

Out of the crowd of cheers and well-wishers breaks her Dad. She stares out through the tears quivering in her eyes like hot mercury and begins the memorized speech, *"Dad, I'm sorry. I know...."*

He interrupts her. *"Hush child. We've got no time for that. No time for apologies. You'll be late for the party. A banquet's waiting for you at home."*

I don't know if you have ever had one of those, thank God your home moments, in either big or little ways, but they stick with us. As a parent or someone close to a child, most of us would feel a great amount of fear and grief, in amongst our anger, if a child left us for reasons that felt like a gut punch to all of our love. Their response to our love, one of rebellion. How we long to love our children and have them understand just how deeply

¹ [The Prodigal Son: A Modern-Day Telling | Soul Food](#) Accessed March 28, 2025.

they are loved by us. Yet how often do children respond with “I hate you” or “I’m out of here.” Even our adult children can break our hearts when they don’t respond to our inquiries about their well being, or don’t take time to show us that we as care givers, as parents, matter to them.

Whether or not you have children, there may be children in your lives that matter so much to you that, like a parent, your heart aches to know that they are well, or you do whatever you can to let them know that they are important to you. We do these things because relationships matter, love matters. Now imagine or remember times when it hurt so bad, maybe it still does, knowing that they either don’t care, or don’t take the time to care. Maybe you are completely estranged and you haven’t heard from someone for a long time and you just wish you could bridge the divide. You would be thrilled to celebrate good times with them again.

With this in mind you may be able to get a sense of God’s desire to be in relationship with you and with each of us. It gets to the heart of the parable that has been known for a long time as the parable of the prodigal son. Now, how something is named is also how we tend to view it. However, what if we renamed the parable to give it a different focus. What about the older brother? Who by the way was working out in the field as the party preparations are being made and the party begins, he was left in the field to work. Did you notice he didn’t even know there was a party going on until he was coming in from a long day of work.

A person would be pretty miffed, and that is saying it mildly, they would be pretty P.O.ed if they had come in from a long day of work to find everyone celebrating the brother who had dishonoured his father by asking for his inheritance before the father had even died. You might have noticed that the older brother couldn’t even say “brother” he called the younger one “This son of yours”. Maybe we could call this story, as I heard it named by another, the Lament of the Responsible Child.

You may be able to relate to the story through either or both of the brothers, or the father’s points of view. Maybe you have actually lived this kind of story in some way. And we must look at the father’s point of view...a parent who despite all of the harm, the dishonour, has an outpouring of love and joy that his son has returned. It does not mean that the older son is loved less or doesn’t hold a special place, it just means that love triumphs over all the pain.

It doesn’t make sense to the younger or older son. The younger one, whether coming back with a truly contrite heart or not, surely didn’t expect a celebration. A chilly reception would have been more in order. And the older son can’t get his mind wrapped around the welcome either. How could his father be so ridiculous as to let this so-called son make a fool of him again? There is no way, in this ancient culture of honour, that his father should have allowed this one to return in this way. What was he thinking!

But for the father, grace is the only way. It was a radical act in its time and it still would be a radical act of love today. If we were to try on another name for the parable maybe it could be, as again was said by someone else, “The Parable of Misunderstood Grace.”

What is grace? Well, I have read it described as, “The free gift in which God gives all – eternal life, forgiveness, purpose, meaning – to human beings, who respond by trying to earn it.”² That is what is so radical about this whole story is that God loves us beyond our imagining. God’s desire is to be in relationship with us; to love us and be loved, and God lavishes this love on us even though we break God’s heart consistently day by day. Each day that love is available to us.

Thing is, once we experience that kind of grace, recognize that we are loved, even with all that we get wrong, we have to look around and see, acknowledge that the same grace is there for everyone. Not just the people we think deserve it or have earned it. It is a free and lavish gift offered to the most hardened criminal, the pimp who deals in sex trafficking, as well as the child who squanders an inheritance.

What is even crazier is that the only way some of these people get to know that God loves them that much is if we demonstrate that love in our own words and actions. It is not that sin doesn’t have consequences, but grace can still be experienced as we work out what needs to be worked out.

It is not straightforward or easy, it is complicated and messy, even so, grace is there, God’s grace, God’s love, God’s inexplicable desire to be in relationship with this broken humanity, in relationship with each of us. This is what is so amazing about grace and grace is the central theme of this parable.

Let me end with a final quote from Phillip Yancey’s book, *What So Amazing About Grace*.

We are accustomed to finding a catch in every promise, but Jesus’ stories of extravagant grace include no catch, no loophole disqualifying us from God’s love. [When we “come home”], to God it feels like the discovery of a lifetime. As Dutch author, Henri Nouwen, points out, *“God rejoices not because the problems of the world have been solved, not because all human pain and suffering have come to an end,...No, God rejoices because one of His children who was lost has been found.”*³

May you experience God’s grace today. May you be a conduit for God’s grace in the world. May we celebrate these good times in community and as the church. In Christ, with Christ, and through Christ. Amen.

Prayers of the People

Gracious God, you have called us together as your people,

² Jacobson, Rolf A., Editor. *Crazy Talk: A Not-So-Stuffy Dictionary of Theological Terms*. Augsburg Books. Minneapolis. 2008.P78.

³ [The Prodigal Son: A Modern-Day Telling | Soul Food](#) Accessed March 28, 2025.

to be the church of Jesus Christ.

Make us one in faith and discipleship,
breaking bread together and telling the good news,
so that the world may believe you are love,
turn to your ways, and live in the light of your truth.

Creator God, you made all things and called them good.

We pray for the earth in its vulnerability,
depleted by our lifestyle choices and our economic expectations.
Inspire reverence for the earth in all people.

Guide us all to make wiser choices for the sake of your creation.

Help us use resources wisely, with future generations in mind,
guarding the fragile balances you have set between many precious species.

Jesus Christ, Prince of peace, you taught us of God's reconciling grace
speak to the hearts of all your people
in this time when so many neighbours and nations sit in judgment on each other,
provoking conflict and resentment.

Teach us how to seek peace on earth together.

Call those in positions of power and influence to work for the common good.

Turn us away from anger, fear, violence or vanity,
which can turn neighbour against neighbour and nation against nation.

May all who claim your name be known as makers of peace.

O Christ, healer of hearts and hopes,

you desire health and wholeness for each one of us.

We pray that those who have lost their livelihoods may find true abundance.

Give rest and renewal to those who are broken in body, mind or spirit,
and bring comfort and hope to all who face loss and loneliness.

In silence we lift before you the names of those on our hearts today:

Spirit of power and promise, embrace us with hope this day

so that we may live faithfully,

encouraging each other by the commitment we see in Jesus Christ,
who taught us to pray together:

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Lord's Prayer

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

Invitation to the offering

As we offer our tithes and offerings, may we not be like the older brother, grumbling and resentful of God's generosity. Rather, with joy and hope, offer gifts that others might be swept up in God's loving and gracious arms.

Adapted from ©2025 Thom M. Shuman. <http://lectionaryliturgies.blogspot.com> March 30.

Should you so choose, this time is an opportunity to give a financial gift in honour of God's work in your life and as a response in faith. It is used by our ministry in glory to God. So, we gather our gifts together and present them as an offering of gratitude and praise.

There are various ways that people give to this congregation for our work as God's people, through signing up for a monthly donation, or sending an etransfer.

Check out the opportunities to support St. Andrew's ministry at our website, [St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Thunder Bay, ON – Part of the PCCWeb network of churches](#)

Hymn

One more step along the world I go

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1. One more step along the world I go.
One more step along the world I go.
From the old things to the new
keep me traveling along with you.

Refrain

*And it's from the old I travel to the new.
Keep me traveling along with you.*

2. Round the corners of the world I turn.
More and more about the world I learn.
All the new things that I see
you'll be looking at along with me.

Refrain

3. As I travel through the bad and good
keep me traveling the way I should.
Where I see no way to go,
you'll be telling me the way, I know.

Refrain

4. Give me courage when the world is rough.
Keep me loving though the world is tough.
Leap and sing in all I do.
Keep me traveling along with you.

Refrain

5. You are older than the world can be.
You are younger than the life in me.
Ever old and ever new,
keep me traveling along with you.

Refrain

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Benediction

Go forth as ambassadors for Christ,
in whom we have new life.

The God of reconciliation bless us,
the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ keep us,
and the power of the Holy Spirit strengthen us this day and every day.

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