

11th September 2022 Written and Record Service

Welcome whenever or wherever you are joining in this act of worship.

Call

Amazing Grace – how sweet the sound -
that saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost but now I'm found,
Was blind but now I see. (StF 440)

Singing the Faith 364

- O for a thousand tongues to sing
my great Redeemer's praise,
the glories of my God and King,
the triumphs of his grace!
- 2 My gracious Master and my God,
assist me to proclaim,
to spread through all the earth abroad
the honours of your name.
- 3 Jesus -- the name that charms our fears,
that bids our sorrows cease;
'tis music in the sinner's ears,
'tis life, and health, and peace.
- 4 He breaks the power of cancelled sin,
he sets the prisoner free;
his blood can make the foulest clean,
his blood availed for me.
- 5 He speaks; and, listening to his voice,
new life the dead receive;
the mournful, broken hearts rejoice;
the humble poor believe.
- 6 See all your sins on Jesus laid:
the Lamb of God was slain;
his soul was once an offering made
that all may heaven gain.
- 7 In Christ, our Head, you then shall know,
shall feel, your sins forgiven,
anticipate your heaven below,
and own that love is heaven.

Charles Wesley (1707-1788)

Let us pray

God of Love, we come to you in worship.
We come because you first came to us.
We come because when we have moved far
away
you seek us out and find us.
Loving God it is beyond our understanding
that you should reach out to us
even when we turn away from you.
Because you do not let us go,
because you seek and find us when we are lost,

we find that we want to be found
and that our lives hold no meaning without you.
And so Lord we come in worship to seek you and
be found by you.

We come with thanks and praise and so
we pray with the words that Jesus first 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

Lost and found is the theme for today's service
and our Bible readings take us deeper into what it
means to find something that has been lost and
what it means to be found, and more especially,
when we are lost what it means to be found by
God.

I'll let the two readings speak for themselves and
then we will look more closely at them.

Luke 15:1-10 - New International Version

15 Now the tax collectors and sinners were all
gathering around to hear Jesus. ² But the
Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered,
"This man welcomes sinners and eats with them."
³ Then Jesus told them this parable: ⁴ "Suppose
one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of
them. Doesn't he leave the ninety-nine in the
open country and go after the lost sheep until he
finds it? ⁵ And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it
on his shoulders ⁶ and goes home. Then he calls
his friends and neighbours together and says,
'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.'⁷ I
tell you that in the same way there will be more
rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents
than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do
not need to repent.

⁸ "Or suppose a woman has ten silver coins and
loses one. Doesn't she light a lamp, sweep the
house and search carefully until she finds
it? ⁹ And when she finds it, she calls her friends
and neighbours together and says, 'Rejoice with
me; I have found my lost coin.'¹⁰ In the same
way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of
the angels of God over one sinner who repents."

1 Timothy 1:12-17 New International Version

¹² I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has given
me strength, that he considered me trustworthy,
appointing me to his service. ¹³ Even though I was

once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief. ¹⁴ The grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly, along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. ¹⁵ Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst. ¹⁶ But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his immense patience as an example for those who would believe in him and receive eternal life. ¹⁷ Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen.

Let us pray

Forgiving God,

We are crafted in Your divine image: we rejoice; but we fall short of Your perfect love so we lament;

we contribute to the pain of others so we confess; we fear what we do not understand so we repent.

Let us take a few moments now to talk to our merciful God about the things we have done which we shouldn't have done which now may fill us with shame or remorse

And the things we should have done but didn't which we now regret.....

God forgives our sins

Thanks be to God.

Forgiving God, we turn to you and in our return to You, welcoming God, we seek Your healing, transforming touch, knowing You will not withhold it, not now, not ever: praise be to You, O God! Amen

StF 429 Lord we turn to you for mercy

Lord, we turn to you for mercy:
may our prayerful words express
something of our heartfelt sorrow
for the sins we now confess.

- 2 We have trusted far too often in our human strength and skill; we have proudly disregarded what we knew to be your will.
- 3 Yet by your immense compassion you invite, accept, restore, leading us to greater wholeness than we ever knew before.
- 4 Your forgiveness lifts our burdens, setting heart and spirit free to fulfil our true potential, all that we were meant to be.
- 5 For you teach a way of wisdom

we may clearly understand:
walking with the God of mercy
step by step, and hand in hand.

Martin Leckebusch (b. 1962)

Have you lost something precious?

Have you ever been lost?

Have you perhaps turned round in the supermarket and lost sight of your child? Or, as a child, turned round and lost sight of the person looking after you? Can you remember the terror and then the joy of finding and being found.

In Jesus' two parables and in Paul's words there are references to sinners. 'What is a sinner?' we may ask. I think that we will all be honest enough to accept that our behaviour often falls short of the standards we ask of ourselves, and we know that we most certainly fall short of the standards of behaviour shown to us by Jesus. In that we are all sinners. Although we know this, we may take some pleasure in not being as bad as 'those others' - the ones who are sent to prison or the ones we don't like. When we compare ourselves to history's bad guys, Hitler perhaps or we could name so many, past and present but we won't because this is not what our readings are telling us today. But, are these examples the yardstick by which we should measure our behaviour? No. Of course, we should recognize sin and condemn it but not use what we see in others as an excuse for ignoring our own shortcomings. What counts is our relationship with God. Remember those stickers people used to have - WWJD - What Would Jesus Do? They were meant to remind us to measure our actions against Jesus' teaching and actions. Whenever we knowingly do something that is not what Jesus would do then we commit a sin, big or small, and damage our relationship with God.

Today we have 2 stories told by Jesus and a personal testimony from Paul and each ends with the same affirmation that God seeks us out even when we get things wrong again and again. It's an affirmation that God's grace reaches out to find us when we are lost. We are not saved from ourselves by our own actions but by what God does for us.

Jesus the teacher, as always, uses examples from real life to illustrate his points and not for the only time describes a good shepherd. I am reliably informed that shepherds worked in groups to look after all the sheep from a village. I was pleased when I found that out because I was concerned that, on a first reading, it looked as if the shepherd had left the 99 sheep alone when he set out to find the missing one which doesn't seem very responsible. Even so it was a difficult task, and a successful outcome was not

guaranteed. Sheep, like people, can be very careless of their own safety. The description of the shepherd's joy at finding that one lost sheep, only 1% of the flock, is, of course, a small reflection of God's joy when any sinner, no matter how small or large the sin, repents.

Then there's the other story of the lost coin. It's difficult to lose something precious.

For this reason, we have no difficulty understanding the woman and the lost coin. From the description of the house in which she lived we can assume that she was not rich for the house was poor and dark with only rushes over the earth floor through which she had to search to find the coin. The coin, though not very valuable, meant so much to her because she had so little.

I was reading a report from the Joint Public Issues Team the other day looking at the issues facing the government in tackling the rising cost of living. Their comment was that important as long-term plans are, for the very poor there is no long term. Life is simply a matter of existing from day to day, scratching an existence. Imagine then the joy of that poor woman on finding the coin and sharing the news with friends. Great as her joy was, nothing compared with the joy in heaven over one sinner who repents.

Jesus told these 2 parables because he had been challenged by the teachers of the law and the pharisees because he was mixing so closely with sinners. In these politically correct days when we try so hard to regard everyone as equal and not judge them for being in any way different from ourselves, it is hard to understand just how different it was in those days. The way to sinlessness for those teachers of the law was to keep themselves apart and not mix with anyone seen to be breaking the law, and the law was so detailed it was very easy to break it. It was a lesson difficult for them to understand that God sought out sinners and welcomed them. How could there be more joy in heaven over one repentant sinner than all the righteous people? Their feeling might be that there would be more joy in the sinner who is 'suitably' punished.

Although we might not express it quite so strongly is there not, in our own times that same desire for vengeance often represented as justice? We know that justice in its most primitive form and has nothing to do with God's justice which is always tempered with mercy. God is kinder than men.

And now we come to Paul and his own words. There is no doubt in my mind that when Paul was blinded on the road to Damascus he did indeed meet the risen Christ Jesus and that encounter

turned his life round as direct encounters with Jesus have always done for so many. His words speak for themselves. You may wish, if you're reading this, to look again at his words from our second reading or, if you are watching on You tube, rewind and hear them again for they are an amazing testimony of how a 'sinner' feels when confronted by God's grace.

In those words we see Paul's wondering and amazed response to God's grace to one who before had done everything in his power to stamp out those early Christians and to deny all that Jesus was. Now, completely turned round, he experienced not just wonder but a deep thankfulness. His response was gratitude that he was chosen, that now he was trusted, that he was appointed to a new and special work, and he was empowered to carry that out.

And so, for us. Do you remember the words of introduction when the judge is sentencing Fletcher to prison in the old sitcom 'Porridge'? He says, 'You are an habitual criminal who accepts arrest as an occupational hazard and you leave me no choice but to sentence you to the maximum term allowed'.

We are habitual offenders, but God has a more positive approach to our offending than human systems. To those who repent, who are lost but then found, he offers full and free forgiveness and a fresh start. So let us, in our turn, also extend that grace to others. And let us remember how God loves us and how little we deserve it and, remembering our sin, but sincerely repenting, accept that we are free from it - completely cured. And that is what the Bible teaches throughout all the accounts of God's dealings with his people over millennia. There is joy in heaven when an individual recognizes that and responds but also joy and freedom for the individual who recognizes the security of living within God's grace. Amen and thanks be to God

Let us pray

Loving Lord we bring our prayers to you knowing that you know what is in our hearts even before we can find the words to express our deepest needs. We pray because we need to share our hopes, our worries, and our concern for others with you.... to ask you to act in the lives of those we pray for and to show us what you would have us do.

Lord, you know our thoughts, our longings, and our fears before we know them ourselves

We know no peace until we know you

To your loving care Lord, we give all those we know who are troubled or ill. In quietness now we

name those we know who are in need of your healing touch today.

.....

Lord, you know our thoughts, our longings, and our fears before we know them ourselves

We know no peace until we know you

We pray for those who do not acknowledge that they need help.....

Those in our world who hurt others through ignorance or lust for power or wickedness

We pray for their victims...

Victims of wars, of terrorism, of crime

Victims of failing societies.

While helping the victims teach us also to forgive and show your love to those who do wrong.

Help us to clearly condemn what is evil but be channels of forgiveness – a forgiveness that accepts and supports all those who repent.

Lord, you know our thoughts, our longings, and our fears before we know them ourselves

We know no peace until we know you

We pray for this country's and the world's leaders. Grant them compassion and a desire for peace always balancing their own immediate and short-term desires with the good of all peoples and the planet which you have lent to us.

Lord, you know our thoughts, our longings, and our fears before we know them ourselves

We know no peace until we know you

We pray for ourselves

We recognise our past pains and our fears for the future

In the quietness now we share them with you and ask you to take each memory and each fear and heal each one of us and, as we relinquish each to you, let us not be tempted to snatch them back.....

Teach us to live as people healed and made whole by you.

Lord, you know our thoughts, our longings and our fears before we know them ourselves

Help us to answer your call.

And so Lord let us walk with you and know your peace.

May our lives speak of you
and our whole beings wait on you,
to hear your word and do your will
Our Lord and our God. Amen

StF 407 Hear the call of the kingdom.

Hear the call of the kingdom,
lift your eyes to the King;

let his song rise within you
as a fragrant offering
of how God, rich in mercy,
came in Christ to redeem
all who trust in his unfailing grace.

Hear the call of the kingdom
to be children of light
with the mercy of heaven,
the humility of Christ;
walking justly before him,
loving all that is right,
that the life of Christ may shine through us.

King of heaven, we will answer the call.
We will follow, bringing hope to the world,
filled with passion, filled with power to proclaim
salvation in Jesus' name.

Hear the call of the kingdom
to reach out to the lost
with the Father's compassion
in the wonder of the cross,
bringing peace and forgiveness,
and a hope yet to come:
let the nations put their trust in him.

King of heaven, we will answer the call.
We will follow, bringing hope to the world,
filled with passion, filled with power to proclaim
salvation in Jesus' name.
Keith Getty (b. 1974), Kristyn Getty (b. 1980) and
Stuart Townend (b. 1963)

Benediction

Let us go in peace to love and serve the Lord.
And now may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ
and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy
Spirit remain with us all now and always. Amen

Joan Bailey