

# Praying the Scripture - a few simple steps at home

## Sunday 11<sup>th</sup> Sept 2022

Start with stillness and quietening down; then gently read the passage, noticing any feelings and connections to your own experience.

1. Read the passage again and spend understand. *The notes in your Bible may be of help at this point.*
2. Read the passage a third time - wondering how you yourself might pray the text over the next few days.
3. Over the next week, set aside times to come back more than once to the passage. You could read it all or part of it again, slowly. Perhaps there is a special word for you in this passage of Scripture? Keep this word or phrase in your thoughts and gently repeat it, bringing it to mind and allowing God to speak to you in your heart.
4. Finally, come back to the text to conclude: What is God in this scripture asking of you this week? What is the one challenge, one little change you are asked to make or the thing you have been asked to do? Then say a prayer of thanksgiving for the good news in the passage. End in quiet prayer.



### THIS SUNDAY'S GOSPEL – Luke 15:1-3, 11-32 *Lost & Found*

*The tax collectors and the sinners were all seeking the company of Jesus to hear what he had to say, and the Pharisees and the scribes complained. 'This man' they said, 'welcomes sinners and eats with them.' So he spoke this parable to them: 'What man among you with a hundred sheep, losing one, would not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the missing one till he found it? And when he found it, would he not joyfully take it on his shoulders and then, when he got home, call together his friends and neighbours? "Rejoice with me," he would say "I have found my sheep that was lost." In the same way, I tell you, there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one repentant sinner than over ninety-nine virtuous men who have no need of repentance.*

*'Or again, what woman with ten drachmas would not, if she lost one, light a lamp and sweep out the house and search thoroughly till she found it? And then, when she had found it, call together her friends and neighbours? "Rejoice with me," she would say "I have found the drachma I lost." In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing among the angels of God over one repentant sinner.'*

*He also said, 'A man had two sons. The younger said to his father, "Father, let me have the share of the estate that would come to me." So the father divided the property between them. A few days later, the younger son got together everything he had and left for a distant country where he squandered his money on a life of debauchery.*

*'When he had spent it all, that country experienced a severe famine, and now he began to feel the pinch, so he hired himself out to one of the local inhabitants who put him on his farm to feed the pigs. And he would willingly have filled his belly with the husks the pigs were eating but no one offered him anything. Then he came to his senses and said, "How many of my father's paid servants have more food than they want, and here am I dying of hunger! I will leave this place and go to my father and say: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you; I no longer deserve to be called your son; treat me as one of your paid servants." So he left the place and went back to his father.*

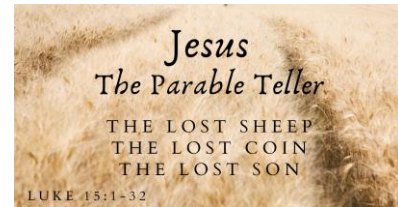
*'While he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was moved with pity. He ran to the boy, clasped him in his arms and kissed him tenderly. Then his son said, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I no longer deserve to be called your son." But the father said to his servants, "Quick! Bring out the best robe and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the calf we have been fattening, and kill it; we are going to have a feast, a celebration, because this son of mine was dead and has come back to life; he was lost and is found." And they began to celebrate.*

*'Now the elder son was out in the fields, and on his way back, as he drew near the house, he could hear music and dancing. Calling one of the servants he asked what it was all about. "Your brother has come" replied the servant "and your father has killed the calf we had fattened because he has got him back safe and sound." He was angry then and refused to go in, and his father came out to plead with him; but he answered his father, "Look, all these years I have slaved for you and never once disobeyed your orders, yet you never offered me so much as a kid for me to celebrate with my friends. But, for this son of yours, when he comes back after swallowing up your property – he and his women – you kill the calf we had been fattening."*

*'The father said, "My son, you are with me always and all I have is yours. But it was only right we should celebrate and rejoice, because your brother here was dead and has come to life; he was lost and is found.'"*

### A Short Thought

*The three parables in this week's reading constitute Jesus' response to the Pharisees and scribes, who were grumbling amongst themselves about Jesus eating (repeatedly) with those people, "tax collectors and sinners". It is worth noting the unexpected actions of the parable characters. A shepherd cares so much for one lost sheep that he leaves ninety-nine*



*behind in the wilderness. A woman expends significant energy to find her lost coin, and then hosts a party that likely costs her more than the coin is worth. A father showers gifts upon his disrespectful, wasteful son, simply because the kid shows up. Such are the ways of God. Looking at the story of the prodigal son which is almost too familiar to all of us. The younger son returned home, and the older son stayed home. What is being asked of us? We are challenged to go deeper into the story and to become the father...to BE home for others. But, for a moment, what if God isn't the father in this story? What if God instead is the prodigal who seems so irresponsible? What if God is the God who also comes to us in the disguise of those we most despise, those who have hated and killed us, those who shun us and ignore us, those who have rejected us and abandoned us, those who annoy and frustrate us most, argue or disagree with us; those who are excluded? In the guise of the sinner, the debauched, the prostitute, the unclean, the enemy, the unchurched, the unsavoury, ... What if God comes to us and challenges us to participate in a radical, irresponsible, gospel hospitality that turns the rules of polite society and comfortable religiosity upside-down?*

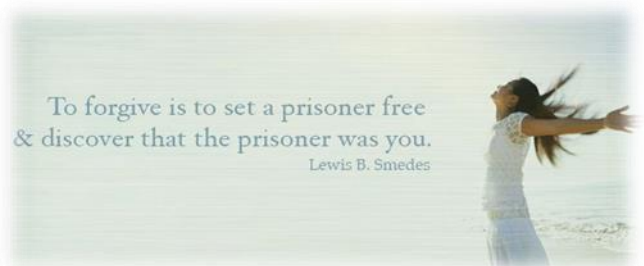
*And if God comes to us as this, how do we respond? As the father does... subverting social norms, forgiving and opening his life to the chaos the prodigal brings? Or as the brother does, maintaining society's values but closing off his life to loving or accepting the Other? What if the challenge of this story is whether or not we will run out to meet Jesus with open arms when we see him lost, alone, bedraggled, ignored, neglected and abused; whether we will be eager and expectant to do the irresponsible thing of living out the Good News of radical mercy, forgiveness, inclusion, love and welcome. What if...? Do I, like the father in the story, have the generosity to accept Jesus as he appears; or like the brother, do I demand that he not be so irresponsible and insist that he comes to me only in the ways I find acceptable?*

## SOME POINTERS FOR PRAYER

- Like most I love this week's gospel. But if asked - What one word would sum up this story for you? Why?
- Read the story and try put yourself in the place of each of the characters – The Pharisees & Tax Collectors, The Shepherd, The Widow, The Father, The Younger Son, The Servants, The Older Son. How might they tell the story differently? What would they have been feeling as the story unfolded?
- What character in the parables appeals to you most? Which do you most identify with, Why?
- The older son may have felt rightly hard-done-by as his wayward brother receives the plaudits. But Jesus is teaching us that God's love is a gift freely given, not earned. And like any gift we have to recognise it, accept it and allow it to transform our lives and relationships. Where/when have you felt this love from others? And when has this made you think of God's love for you?
- To truly know that in our darkest hour, when we feel at our most alone we are always loved is Good News. Do we accept we are loved by God who is always ready to welcome us with open arms?

## Prayer

Loving, compassionate Father, you stand always with your arms outstretched awaiting unconditionally for our return. Give us the courage to see, feel and know that we are loved. May we always have the strength to forgive and be forgiven so that we may always joyfully dance and sing in the wonder of your love. We ask this, as always, through Jesus Christ your son, Amen



### Prayer in these uncertain times

*We pray for all those in our country and throughout the world suffering from the Corona Virus. May its victims and their families be strengthened by the support of our community of faith and restored soon to full health. We also pray for our leaders and medical personnel who deal with the virus. May we keep calm and may we join together in solidarity with care and compassion to tackle this emergency. This we ask in confidence through Christ Our Lord. Amen*

*We pray for Ukraine. For all of humanity distorted by war. For all the lives lost, homes seized, and peace broken. May the Spirit of comfort and compassion envelop all who dwell in fear. May peace prevail and justice reign. May love always be the guide and measure of our actions and responses. Amen*

