

COLLECT, READINGS AND REFLECTION
SUNDAY 27 MARCH 2022- Mothering Sunday

COLLECT

God of compassion,
whose Son Jesus Christ, the child of Mary,
shared the life of a home in Nazareth,
and on the cross drew the whole human family to himself:
strengthen us in our daily living that in joy and in sorrow
we may know the power of your presence to bind together and to heal;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

Psalm 32

- 1 Happy the one whose transgression is forgiven, ♦
and whose sin is covered.
- 2 Happy the one to whom the Lord imputes no guilt, ♦
and in whose spirit there is no guile.
- 3 For I held my tongue; ♦
my bones wasted away
through my groaning all the day long.
- 4 Your hand was heavy upon me day and night; ♦
my moisture was dried up like the drought in summer.
- 5 Then I acknowledged my sin to you ♦
and my iniquity I did not hide.
- 6 I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the Lord,' ♦
and you forgave the guilt of my sin.
- 7 Therefore let all the faithful make their prayers to you
in time of trouble; ♦
in the great water flood, it shall not reach them.
- 8 You are a place for me to hide in;
you preserve me from trouble; ♦
you surround me with songs of deliverance.
- 9 'I will instruct you and teach you
in the way that you should go; ♦
I will guide you with my eye.
- 10 'Be not like horse and mule which have no understanding; ♦
whose mouths must be held with bit and bridle,
or else they will not stay near you.'
- 11 Great tribulations remain for the wicked, ♦
but mercy embraces those who trust in the Lord.
- 12 Be glad, you righteous, and rejoice in the Lord; ♦
shout for joy, all who are true of heart.

Joshua 5: 9-12

⁹The LORD said to Joshua, 'Today I have rolled away from you the disgrace of Egypt.' And so that place is called Gilgal^[a] to this day.

The Passover at Gilgal

¹⁰While the Israelites were encamped in Gilgal they kept the passover in the evening on the fourteenth day of the month in the plains of Jericho. ¹¹On the day after the passover, on that very day, they ate the produce of the land, unleavened cakes and parched grain. ¹²The manna ceased on the day they ate the produce of the land, and the Israelites no longer had manna; they ate the crops of the land of Canaan that year.

Luke 15.1-3,11b-32

Now all the tax-collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to him. ² And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, 'This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them.'

³ So he told them this parable:

'There was a man who had two sons. ¹² The younger of them said to his father, "Father, give me the share of the property that will belong to me." So he divided his property between them. ¹³ A few days later the younger son gathered all he had and travelled to a distant country, and there he squandered his property in dissolute living. ¹⁴ When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that country, and he began to be in need. ¹⁵ So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs. ¹⁶ He would gladly have filled himself with the pods that the pigs were eating; and no one gave him anything. ¹⁷ But when he came to himself he said, "How many of my father's hired hands have bread enough and to spare, but here I am dying of hunger! ¹⁸ I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; ¹⁹ I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands.'" ²⁰ So he set off and went to his father. But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him. ²¹ Then the son said to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son." ²² But the father said to his slaves, "Quickly, bring out a robe—the best one—and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. ²³ And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; ²⁴ for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!" And they began to celebrate.

²⁵ 'Now his elder son was in the field; and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. ²⁶ He called one of the slaves and asked what was going on. ²⁷ He replied, "Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has got him back safe and sound." ²⁸ Then he became angry and refused to go in. His father came out and began to plead with him. ²⁹ But he answered his father, "Listen! For all these years I have been working like a slave for you, and I have never disobeyed your command; yet you have never given me even a young goat so that I might celebrate with my friends. ³⁰ But when this son of yours came back, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fatted calf for him!" ³¹ Then the father said to him, "Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. ³² But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found.'"

A reflection from Hannah...

How bad can it get?! For most of us, the experience of coming to the end of ourselves is mercifully rare. The younger son in our Gospel reading has managed it- with quite some flourish. To ask for his father's inheritance was the equivalent of wishing him dead, and then if that wasn't enough, he squandered it with reckless abandon until he found himself in a foreign land, hired to feed the pigs. The decision to return to his father was a last-ditched hope, grasped from a place of utter desolation and in the realisation that there was nowhere else to turn.

And it's the contrast between that and the next bit of the story that teaches us so much about love. The moment of reconciliation is achingly beautiful, has been captured by artists and sculptors down the centuries and remains a touchstone peace of scripture:

'while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him.'

It's what we all long for when things have gone so very, very wrong that all feels lost. The lavish reconciliation of the father with the son, complete with the ring and robe (signs of royalty and belonging) speaks to our deepest longings. In it, we find God's love- love that lets us go our own way, but always welcomes us home.

This Mothering Sunday we may feel we have come to the end of our collective selves as we continue to be nonplussed and heartbroken by the war in Ukraine. We pray, we give, we prepare our homes for welcoming refugees, but peace still eludes us. We think of parents and caregivers who long for that moment of reconciliation when they welcome home a lost loved one- parents both in Ukraine and in Russia. We cannot ignore the loss that war continues to bring- the 109 empty prams lined up in the centre of Lviv symbolising children who have died these past weeks is a harrowing reminder of human agony. We turn to God in our desperation, recognising how far humanity has wandered into chaos, and we place our trust, our dependence, our hope in God the Father who welcomes us home, who can do more than we can ask or imagine, and in whom we find the perfect example of parental love.

And so today we give thanks for all who 'mother' us. They may be our birth mothers, but they may also be anyone (male or female) who cares for us, nurtures and encourages us, whatever our age. As we keep that image of the father and son reconciled in mind, we thank God for the love we've received, and we pray that we too will be ministers of that same love which welcomes home the lost and says 'you are found'.