

**Worship Material**  
**What kind of welcome**  
**Material from Roots Bible Study**  
**Sunday 30<sup>th</sup> March**

**Begin with an opening prayer**

Loving God,  
we gather in this place assured of your love.  
You know our failures, fickleness and faithlessness,  
yet you still welcome us into your presence.  
Help us to do the same,  
welcoming all in your name.

**Amen.**

**Read Luke 15:1-3,11b-32**

**Bible notes**

Luke uses a common technique here of telling the same story three times, in slightly different ways, in order to drive home the intended message. Jesus is addressing the Pharisees and scribes who are grumbling because they have noticed that among the crowd travelling with Jesus and listening to him are 'tax collectors and sinners' – that is, those who are working for the occupying Roman forces, and those who are publicly judged to be living in a way that is out of step with God. The Pharisees and scribes are leaders among the Jewish people and work hard to protect the faith from those who might water it down or introduce heresy. Recognising that sometimes we need protecting from ourselves, they are keen to keep God's people pure. Hearing their grumbling, Jesus tells them in three different ways the importance of seeking out what is lost and celebrating when it is found. The stories are not identical – the sheep, coin and son have different levels of agency in their becoming lost, and in their being found – but the result is always the same: a celebration that mirrors the joy in heaven when someone turns back to God.

This parable, the third in the set, introduces another dimension: the question of how different characters respond to the same event. While the father has longed for the son's return – not seeking him out against his will but watching out for him to choose to return – and celebrates this, the brother who never left is first (inadvertently perhaps) excluded from the celebration, and then

peevish, jealous and angry. He takes for granted the intimate relationship he has sustained with his father and his home securities, and does not wish to risk the change entailed in welcoming the returning brother.

### **Prayer**

Generous God,  
on this Mothering Sunday, we thank you for mothers, parents and all who care for us. Love shapes our life.

But none more so than your love, which is beyond any other.

Thank you that you do not leave us wallowing in the mess we make of life but wait patiently for us to come to our senses.

Thank you for your Son, Jesus Christ, who paid for our sin with his immeasurable sacrifice.

Thank you for your Holy Spirit, who keeps us on track.

Thank you that when we return to you, we are always sure of a warm, comforting embrace.

**Father, Son and Holy Spirit, thank you for restoring us.**

**Amen.**

### **A prayer to conclude**

As we go into the coming week, O God,  
and strive to walk as people of welcome,  
fill us with your grace, mercy and peace.

Bless us, keep us and transform us all,  
and help us to share these gifts with all we meet.

**Amen.**