



Call to Worship

The cry of injustice calls us to follow Jesus to the pain of the cross,
as we prepare to celebrate Christ's rising from death.

Create in us a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within us.

Jesus embodied humility and righteousness; fill us with the courage to examine our ways.

Together, we seek to follow your path to justice, rising to the call and demands of discipleship.

Hymn: *God the Great Creator calls us to Protest* (Tune: StF 306: Noel Nouvelet) Michael Forster © Kevin Mayhew Ltd.

God the great Creator calls us to protest
Where the poor are slighted and the weak oppressed.
Trade wealth for justice! Set the captive free!
Lift the debtor's burden! Sound the jubilee!

God the great Creator calls us to repent
Where our own resources are unjustly spent:
Outwardly praying for a world in pain,
Inwardly desiring ever-greater gain.

God the great Creator calls us to engage
In salvation's drama, on the global stage.
Words leads to actions hitherto unseen;
Actions lead to justice and a change of scene.

God the great Creator tells us to rejoice
Where true love in action gives the poor a voice.
Hope is emerging, justice starts to flow,
Barren worship blossoms, worthy praise can grow.

Opening Prayer

Creator God, your world is a beautiful and wonderful creation. As we learn more about its fragility and vulnerability, we are ashamed that we have done so little to value it, to respect it or to protect it. Fill us with the courage and hope to own the way we have contributed to its damage, whether knowingly or unknowingly, and to change our ways. May we continue to learn more, to renew our commitment to positive action, and to support each other in honouring that commitment. Amen.

Scripture Luke 15:1-3, 11b-32 – *Parable of the Prodigal Son*

An Alternative Retelling of the Parable *Rising to the Call: Can you come back from the bottom?*

Two brothers live in an idyllic world. They are rich beyond measure – they have everything they could ever want. They are part of a loving family: loved beyond anything that can be described by words alone. They live in a place of sheer beauty and wonder, surrounded by everything they need in abundance. This is a tale of what happens when those brothers see the world differently.

Every day the elder brother knows that deep satisfaction that his life is interwoven with nature. He is at one with it and will go to any length to preserve that balance.

In contrast, the younger brother is not at ease. Something is gnawing away deep inside. Is it jealousy? Is it greed? Could it be a void forming deep in the soul? That emptiness becomes a yearning for something new, different, challenging, exciting. As the younger brother, he carries no responsibility to ensure his world is nurtured and tended so that it can flourish. That responsibility fell to his older brother whose life is ordered by his connection to the land. He understands its beauty and fragility. They are not equals – there is an injustice in the distribution of power and meaning.

As unrest eats away at the younger brother, he ceases to value the riches of his life. What he once saw as good fortune turns into his rightful entitlement. He **deserves** everything and he has the right to do with it exactly as he wishes. He no longer sees the world as a vulnerable thing to cherish and tend. It is the means to support his lust for adventure and pleasure. What purpose is served by caring for anything or anyone? The stability and nurture of his loving family environment begins to be a barrier to his selfish fulfilment. He bargains with his parents to be free. "Mother earth", he says, "allow me to take what I am owed – I deserve my inheritance. I can wait no longer before using it to bring me pleasure. I will seek out new adventures and excitement."

He uses his vast wealth to get whatever he wants, wherever he goes. His craving for adventure is no longer sufficient - he is hooked on power. He learns to plunder and exploit resources everywhere he goes, discovering new untapped and apparently limitless excitement. His addiction grows. His arrogance grows. The destruction he leaves in his wake grows. He is desensitised to the havoc he creates. Eventually, his thrill becomes more and more distant. He can no longer attain that next high. His wealth is largely gone – his status is gone – his pleasure is gone. He has spent so long driven by his abusive and selfish nature, that all he has left are a deep indifference and an empty heart where empathy should be. He is alone in the world he has made barren. Alone with his self-destruction and the growing ache of guilt.

Hopelessness, despair and anguish become his new bedfellows. His memories of the beauty and care of Mother earth; the joy of a family; everything is dimming. Deeper and deeper he falls. Each day threatens to be the last. His hunger for adrenalin and excitement turns into starvation. Any scraps will stave off the pangs and pain of hunger. Tears refuse to squeeze from his dried and shrunken eyes.

From the depths of rock bottom, finally in a moment of consciousness amidst his delirium he sees a vision of the beauty of his home before he abandoned it. Before his wanton acts set its destruction in motion. As the events of his life whirl through his semi-consciousness, he finally sees that he is responsible, not just for his fate, but the death and destruction raging all around him. In his unfocused, blurred vision hovering between death and life, his eyes alight upon a seedling growing out of the barren, parched desert land. Summoning his wilting strength, weeping dry tears through the depth of his remorse – he whispers – *“Mother Earth. I see now, that I am responsible for all this destruction, in my greed, and my blindness, and my self-interest. Am I too late? Will you forgive me? Can you forgive me, if I return home? I no longer deserve to return as your son, but, mother earth, is there still enough time to serve you and save you? May I be allowed as your servant to care for you as you once cared for me?”*

Mother earth is waiting, full of hope and promise, as the younger son finally finds the courage to admit the truth. His love for nature is rekindled and he promises to reform.

His elder brother is ANGRY. His connection to nature and his dutiful response has never diminished. That duty has taken its toll though. Every year, the taint of death and destruction has made his task harder. His own spirit has become drained by fighting to stop the advance of the desert – the ferocity of the wildfires, the fury of the storms and floods. He has aged beyond his years. It is hard to hold onto hope amid the devastation. Every year, he has heard promises and commitments from the powerful to change their ways, and every year the pillaging of the earth has intensified. How can he believe and trust anything his scheming brother says?

Consider:

- *How much courage did it take to return home in humiliation?*
- *Who or what do you see in the elder brother?*
- *What hopes are you keeping alive, like the hope of the father or Mother earth?*

Prayers

O God of mercy, we hear the cry of injustice calling us to follow Jesus to the pain of the cross. A little of the light which has come into the world is snuffed out when we lack the courage to examine our ways. As we take this Lenten journey, guide us towards the darkness of the cross, emboldening us to rise to the call of each new challenge placed before us, as we trust in your promises, revealing the power of transformation, and the hope of resurrection.

When we are at our best, those that mother us show us what your love can look like. On this Mothering Sunday, we remember and give thanks for all those who have mothered us, in all the many forms that can mothering can take.

In silent prayer now, lift up your concerns for creation and the world ...

Now we join with the Communion of Protestant Churches in Europe in this prayer for Ukraine:

God Almighty – you are God of peace and justice. We pray for our sisters and brothers in Ukraine, and all places suffering because of war. As we cry out to you in anger and anguish, we pray that peace will reign, and justice prevail.

Jesus Christ – you are the Prince of Peace. We pray that arms will be silent. We pray for those who have the power over peace and war. Grant them wisdom and compassion in their decisions and lead them on the path of peace. Spirit of Truth and Comfort – you have the power to heal and reconcile. We pray for those, who have lost loved ones, their homes, who are in dire need of food, drink, sleep, safety. We pray that you keep your children safe. And we pray that you may grant us discernment, open hearts and ready hands to assist those in need.

Our Father ...

Hymn: STF 727 – *God in His Love for Us Lent Us this Planet* (Fred Pratt Green; 1903-200) © 1973 Stainer & Bell)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r4AeZoZatu8>

God in his love for us lent us this planet,
gave it a purpose in time and in space:
small as a spark from the fire of creation,
cradle of life and the home of our race.

Thanks be to God for its bounty and beauty,
life that sustains us in body and mind:
plenty for all, if we learn how to share it,
riches undreamed of to fathom and find.

Long have our human wars ruined its harvest;
long has earth bowed to the terror of force;
long have we wasted what others have need of,
poisoned the fountain of life at its source.

Earth is the Lord's: it is ours to enjoy it,
ours, as his stewards, to farm and defend.
From its pollution, misuse, and destruction,
Good Lord deliver us, world without end!

Blessing: “Amen! Praise and glory, and wisdom and thanks and honour and power and strength be to our God for ever and ever. Amen!”