

Outrageous love

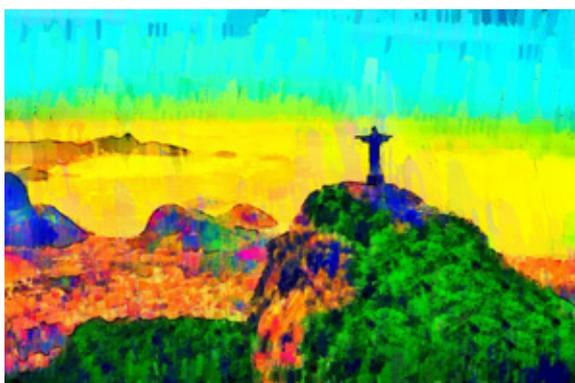
 **Luke 15.1-3,11b-32**

In one of Jesus' best-known stories, a son runs away looking for the high life. Down on his luck, he decides to return home and apologise. Despite the hurt, his father immediately forgives him. An older brother resents this welcome.

Now read **Luke 15.1-3,11b-32** see p.2 for text.

A note on the passage

The week of Mothering Sunday is a good time to reflect on the extraordinary love that good parents offer to their children. This father's love is greater than either of his sons could have imagined. The love God offers is more welcoming and forgiving than we can imagine.



What could you do as an expression of outrageous love?



Use bricks and construction toys – whatever you have – to design and build a farm. Add some workers using e.g. Playmobile™ or Lego™ figures. Talk about the jobs they might do. You could use your farmyard to explore this week's Bible story.

Candle Prayers



You will need: birthday candles – used ones will do; one big candle; a cake; matches or a lighter.

Spend some time together, telling one another what you love about them. For each appreciation, light a candle. People who don't want to speak out can just light candles (supervise children). When people have run out of ideas, or all the candles are lit, blow them out (they don't burn for long); then light the large candle and say this prayer:

God, your love for us is bigger than we can ever understand: brighter than the brightest star, deeper than the deepest sea...(add your own comparatives). Help us all to love like this, to love our family, to love our friends, to love those we don't know and even to love those we don't like! **Amen.**

Hands-on Lent



This week's Gospel reading is about God's outrageous love (the story Jesus told that we sometimes call 'the prodigal son'). Have you ever given – or received – amazing and even outrageous love? What did that feel like? Add to your Hands-on Lent bowl something heart-shaped to remind you of this story. It could be cards, or badges, or sweets (Love hearts) – something that will speak to you of love when you share them out on Easter Day.

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A new GAME



You will need: A4 paper, pencil and crayons; counters and a die.

Make a game based on Snakes and ladders. Draw lines on a sheet of A4 paper to create a 32-square grid. In this game, you start at the top left and finish at the bottom right. Draw a loving parent in the starting square. Number the squares and put some hazards and benefits in a few (e.g. your clothes are stolen while you are swimming: go back three squares). Create some slides down which players fall – with names (e.g. the slide of hunger; the slide of despair). Add one long ladder – The Ladder of Overwhelming Love – which extends from the final square back to the start, to be welcomed by the loving parent. Decorate your board as you choose. Play like Snakes and ladders. On reaching the final square, players must roll a 6 to go up The Ladder of Overwhelming Love. Who could you invite to play?

PARTY PLAN

Instead of one of your normal meals this week, imagine that a long-lost family member or friend arrives out of the blue. Work together to create a 'party' out of just what you have – celebration, decorations, food, perhaps a present. Enjoy together what you have created.

Choose a version of the passage to read. The first is the ROOTS version for children, the second is the NRSV text which may be suitable for older children, young people and adults.

The Pharisees and scribes were grumbling about Jesus. They didn't like the way he welcomed sinners and ate with them. So Jesus told them this story:

'A man had two sons. The younger son said, "Father, I want my share of the property right now." So the father divided the property up. Before long the younger son took his share, packed his bags and left for a faraway country. He had a great time spending his money until it was all gone. Then a famine hit the land. Nothing grew and there was no food. Poor and hungry, the young man took a job feeding pigs in a field. He was so hungry, he could have eaten the pigs' food! But no one gave him anything.

'As he sat there, he realised, "My father's workers have enough food to eat. Here I am dying of hunger. I must go home. I will tell my father that I have done wrong before him and before God. I will say that I am not good enough to be called his son any more. He should just treat me like one of his workers."

'So the young man set off home. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him, ran to him and hugged him. The son told his father everything he had planned to say, but his father shouted to the servants, "Bring out the best robes, put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Kill the fatted calf and we shall celebrate!" And the party began.

'Now the elder son was working in the field and heard music and dancing. "What is happening?" he asked one of the workers. He replied, "Your brother has come home and your father is holding a party." The elder brother was very angry. His father came to speak to him, but the son shouted, "I have worked hard! I have never disobeyed you. You never threw a party for me. He comes back, he's wasted all your money, and you kill the fatted calf for him!" His father answered, "My son, you are always with me, everything I have is yours. But we are celebrating because I thought your brother was dead, and he's alive. He was lost but now he's found!"'

Luke 15.1-3,11b-32

Did you know?

- The Pharisees were Jews who followed religious laws strictly and thought Jesus was not strict enough.
- The fatted calf was the best thing on the farm that the father could give his son.

Luke 15.1-3,11b-32 (NRSV)

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

So he told them this parable: 'There was a man who had two sons. 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. 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. When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that country, and he began to be in need. 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. He would gladly have filled himself with the pods that the pigs were eating; and no one gave him anything. 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! I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands.'" 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. 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." 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. And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!" And they began to celebrate.

'Now his elder son was in the field; and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. He called one of the slaves and asked what was going on. He replied, "Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has got him back safe and sound." Then he became angry and refused to go in. His father came out and began to plead with him. 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. But when this son of yours came back, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fatted calf for him!" Then the father said to him, "Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. 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."'