

WALES' 10TH RECOVERY SUNDAY

RECOGNIZING, ARISING AND CONTRIBUTING

31 OCTOBER 2021



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YN AGORY DRWS I FYWYD NEWYDD
LIVING ROOM CARDIFF
OPENING THE DOOR TO A NEW LIFE



LEADER

Welcome to the 10th Recovery Sunday service for Wales. On this Sunday we invite Christians in Wales to unite in prayer for those who are addicted, dependent; asking God to help us to help them. A warm welcome to you.

LET US PRAY

Holy Spirit, source of all truth, giver of power
Come upon us now
As gently as a dove
Or like tongues of living fire,
As quietly as a summer breeze
Or as a mighty roaring wind.
Come and dwell within us.
Enable us now to do those things which before were impossible.
Unworthy as we are, Holy Spirit of the living God,
Give us those gifts which we can use to your honour and glory
That we may show forth your fruit
Even in our lives.

Glory be to you, Father
Glory be to you, Lord Jesus Christ
Glory be to you, Holy Spirit, (A Shalom Prayer)
AMEN

Hymn 1:

HYMN. 'Lead, kindly Light... (Caneuon Ffydd, 954)

Recovery Sunday is a Sunday for every one of us as recovery places a focus on our values and priorities; the things we value most in our life, the things that matter most to us and the things we take for granted. These are the things that reflect our view of the world and life – our own life. Is it a nightmare or a full and rounded life?

But we tend to avoid such questions, to cast them aside - and for many, asking these questions is like looking over a cliff edge at an unfathomable abyss below. Alcohol or drugs shuts our minds and eyes to these questions and in the process seriously disrupts the lives of many others. But these are questions about what it means to live your life, questions for all of us because we all tend to wear some mask or other so that we can avoid looking over the cliff and the apparent annihilation it represents.

LEADER

**‘What are you and me, brother
But a bundle of bones in a dress of flesh’**

Yes, we have an all too ready tendency to avoid the profound questions of life – who we are, why we exist, how and what creates the mix of thoughts and experiences and influences that have moulded or disturbed us. And what about death itself? We take so much for granted – ourselves, relatives and friends and God himself. We do not see the good or appreciate how much we have going in our favour.

LET US PRAY

Lord, help us to appreciate You, the source and energy of our lives.

Lord, help us to appreciate family and friends.

Lord, help us to appreciate our relationship with our church and our fellow members.

Help us see the wonder of our existence and to focus on the good in our lives and in the lives of others.

It is not only the glory of friendship that reaches us through the extended hand, the kind smile and the joyful companionship, but also the inspiration that comes to us as we discover that someone believes in us and is willing to entrust their friendship to us. Help us to be good friends with You and with each other today.

AMEN

Let us say the Lord's Prayer together.

LEADER

When deep questions imprison us and we have no strength or vision, the most famous parable in the Bible, the parable of the Prodigal Son, reminds us of three steps that release us to opportunity and thus to new life – Recognizing, then Arising and Contributing, These three stages form a process towards restoration to a better life that is beyond our wildest dreams.

Let us listen to the words in Luke 15:11-24.

¹¹ Jesus said, “A certain man had two sons. ¹² The younger son said to his father, ‘Father, give me my share of the inheritance.’ Then the father divided his estate between them. ¹³ Soon afterward, the younger son gathered everything together and took a trip to a land far away. There, he wasted his wealth through extravagant living.

¹⁴ “When he had used up his resources, a severe food shortage arose in that country and he began to be in need. ¹⁵ He hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed pigs. ¹⁶ He longed to eat his fill from what the pigs ate, but no one gave him anything. ¹⁷ When he came to his senses, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired hands have more than enough food, but I’m starving to death! ¹⁸ I will get up and go to my father, and say to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. ¹⁹ I no longer deserve to be called your son. Take me on as one of your hired hands.”’ ²⁰ So he got up and went to his father.

“While he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was moved with compassion. His father ran to him, hugged him, and kissed him. ²¹ Then his son said, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you.

I no longer deserve to be called your son.’²² But the father said to his servants, ‘Quickly, bring out the best robe and put it on him! Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet!’²³ Fetch the fattened calf and slaughter it. We must celebrate with feasting²⁴ because this son of mine was dead and has come back to life! He was lost and is found!’ And they began to celebrate.

LEADER: RECOGNIZING

A clear sign of the son’s problem was his desire to leave home, follow his own path feeling totally self-confident that he could abuse the legacy he had received by wasting it, living a messy if not immoral life, assuming that freedom meant doing as he pleased. He exuded an air of swankiness and false self-confidence. While the wealth continued, so did the popularity despite him losing his self-esteem and self-worth.

Not that independence and confidence in themselves are harmful but this was a false sense of independence and self-confidence – the ‘extravagant living’ masked an empty and wasteful life. It was a rotten way of life without any boundaries or values; he assumed that living a life free of all restrictions was the true life, but this led to the creation of even worse restrictions; a life dependent on the material and the superficial, a plastic existence, with the assumption that this is what living is all about.

But this was his kind of life until he removed the mask and saw himself in his true colours – he walked up to the brink and fell to his lowest ebb. The wealth he thought would give him a life of bliss turned into unbearable emptiness, abandoned by all friends, with no one to help him; all he could do was eat with the pigs. The ‘land far away’ with its promises turned into derision, its hope and attraction turned into overwhelming

imprisonment and isolation, until finally the only option before him was to recognize his sense of hopelessness and his need of help. He came to know himself, he experienced his own fragility and realised that the solution lay in his own hands - 'and when he came to his senses.'

That is the first stage of recovery - taking a look at ourselves, recognizing ourselves. We need to see that our fast living, our high wages, our wealth in cars, houses or holidays let alone alcohol or drugs, over-work, etc. can be a mask to hide the emptiness of what seems to be respectability. It can lead to a sense of empty or false confidence which in turn leads to mental, physical and spiritual entrapment. It is not a nice place to be in but it is a place of hope!

FROM THE CONGREGATION: THE STORY OF SOMEONE DEPENDENT ON ALCOHOL

*"In June 2019 my body, mind and soul were in pain. I had no faith, and every bit of energy I had was used to try to escape from the **blackness**. And the only way to escape was by drinking. Not happy drinking in a pub with friends, music, chatter and laughter, but sad and lonely drinking. Dark and dangerous drunkenness. From the outside, I had a perfect life! Husband, children, job, house... But the truth was that everything was a complete mess. I spent several nights at A&E, had a police visit, countless medical appointments, a period of a few weeks in the care of a community mental health crisis team, and I ran away at every possible opportunity, and nobody knew where I was. I didn't want to die, but I didn't want to live either. The most difficult period of my life.*

When I started my recovery journey by attending groups such as those at the Living Room and Cynnal, I very quickly learned two things – I had to be honest, and I had to have faith. I placed my faith in the groups to start with, and very

slowly I came to understand and to truly believe that there was a much higher power than me that was ready to help me, if I only asked for that help. My life and my family have now completely changed and I put my head on my pillow every night thanking God for another day of recovery."

READING: PSALM 23

The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.

² He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters.

³ He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

⁴ Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.

⁵ Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.

⁶ Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.

HYMN:

'How great thou art...' (Mission Praise, 506)

LEADER: ARISING

It is not easy for anyone to face the pitifulness of their lives or to take the first step by recognising their need for help. It is an even more difficult step to do something positive to challenge and change the situation. There is no point in wallowing in self-pity, we have to decide to move forward and that means, arising, taking a risk, having guts and developing a backbone. There is a time in all our lives when we have to get up and move forward, isn't there? It won't do to admit that life has got the better

of us. The Prodigal Son is no exception in that regard. The next step for him was to say, – ‘I will arise and go to my father’, and he prepared what he wanted to say and acknowledged, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you.’

‘Going to my father’ are not sentimental or childish words which show weakness. This is a man who has reached the end of his tether, has hit rock bottom and was not able to see within himself any way to turn, nor light or hope. It takes determination and courage to turn back once you’ve abandoned something, to open your heart after you’ve hardened it against someone else, to acknowledge weakness and admit defeat when you’ve gone wrong, and to place yourself at the mercy of others without being able to see anything in yourself that’s worth salvaging.

The son could have felt that ‘going to his father’ would be futile and pointless as he had accepted his just rewards. The path of recovery means taking risks, with that risk creating hope. And who else would he turn to? We remember that the Father in this story is a picture of God. We turn to the source of our lives, and the author of our being and we remember that his is a love that gives-of-himself. Nothing is more natural for us than turning to the unconditional and unfathomable love that constantly embraces us and always lifts us on our feet. It isn’t without reason that we speak of God in Jesus as the ‘spring of the living waters’, the ‘light of life’, ‘the way, the truth and the life’.

His love is like living water reviving and renewing us, like light and its heat which gives us life. Whenever we seek this love, we find a sure and solid place on which we can build our lives.

FROM THE CONGREGATION: STORY OF SOMEONE WITH AN EATING DISORDER

"I did everything I could in this period to try to control what I was doing – I tried to starve myself; but once I ate anything, then I'd start bingeing. Many a time in my temper, I'd put food in the bin only to go looking for it a few minutes later and eat it. I would steal biscuits and food from my friends' cupboards at college because my cupboards were empty. I thought if I didn't buy food then it wouldn't be there for me to eat! Trying to deceive everyone and everything, including myself.....I had no interest in acting or succeeding, and all I wanted to do from morning to night was bingeing..... I couldn't go on existing like this any longer, so I took the most difficult and the best decision of my life – which was to put my life on 'hold' for 4 months. I faced all my fears for the first time ever. I realised that I was ill, and that I needed help; I asked for that help, and got it."

HYMN:

Thanks be to Thee (sung to Diolch i Ti, 40 in the Caneuon Ffydd Hymnary)

Thanks be to Thee, Thou great Almighty God,
For the most Holy Gospel.
Hallelujah, Amen.

When in prison dark we once were held,
The blessed sunshine cheered us.
Hallelujah, Amen.

O may this dawn arise the world around.
Till all the nations praise Thee.
Hallelujah, Amen

LEADER: CONTRIBUTING

‘While he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was moved with compassion.’ This wonderful verse describing God cannot be bettered. ‘His father ran to him, hugged him, and kissed him.’ **This is the recovery** – the embrace, the kissing and the gifting – all meeting the depth of the son’s need and representing the vast wealth of the father’s love which enveloped the son, healing him and restoring him to his full and rightful place as a son and not as a servant. The embrace and kissing is more than just forgiveness, essential as that was, as it accepted him back as a member of the family, setting aside the disappointment and anguish of the past, the abandonment and the profligate living. It’s a full recovery. The best dress and sandals meet his needs and give dignity and worth, and the ring represents the union of permanent love. And let us not forget the delight and celebration, indeed, the rejoicing. Jesus said – God is like that. It’s the Father who helps us recover, God celebrates, recovery is joyous and free and, as a result, death turns into a new life; he who had once been lost, is found.

FROM THE CONGREGATION: STORY OF ONE ADDICTED TO WORK

“During the month May 2019 I climbed the well-worn steps of the trusty ladder that had held my body for decades I sighed as I took each step carefully, for I held a heavy petrol hedge cutter in my right hand pointed behind me, the engine ticking over, just as I’d been taught to do as a young man. However, this was to be the last time I’d use this machine.

The plan in my head was to finish everything, my family were well used to my accidents, the coroner would see the scar laden body and accept it as a tragic accident, and wife, children and mother would sadly accept this finding too. As I

drew the rapidly reciprocating blades closer to my throat a sudden thought came into my mind, they will think it was an accident but God would know it was suicide. The hedge cutter was hurled crashing to the ground and I slowly followed it step by aching step.

The hours which followed were more painful than the blades I'd abandoned as I confessed my apparent failure to my wife, then to my GP then to the assembled members of the local crisis centre. The next three months were a blur, people were not quite sure what to say as they saw me mute and glassy eyed, I can't remember who came to visit. I can remember scratching "messages from God" on the paving stones on the patio and on one occasion wrapping myself in a clerical cape at midnight and awaking to the tongues of my two loving dogs and the voice of my equally loving wife calling me back to bed. My memory was shot, my vocabulary was monosyllabic and my heart broken.

I was a vicar for goodness sake! Sadly, I was a vicar who had spent 18 years believing that God wanted me to work 70 or 80 hours a week, relying on the love I gave out and on my tenacity and faith to get me through, the church organisation was very supportive but not for someone who felt they could recover on their own.

Three long months sat in the garden either watching nature carry on its merry way or lying in bed waiting for the NHS follow up call. Then a lifeline came; my wife suggested contacting Cynnal, the churches counselling service, it took 3 strong hints over the course of a week for me to pick up the telephone. A day or two later I met somebody who knew what I felt. A week or two later I met with others further along the road of recovery and then I realised my situation may have been unique but the means of recovery wasn't. Step by step day by day I returned to the shattered burnt out shell of my life and slowly, as if from outside saw it reassemble fragile as porcelain. It was always going to be a different life, never again would I be able to trust utterly in myself, I needed a higher power,

for me every morning would be a reawakening of a reliance on God to (at first) make it through the day then enjoy the day. Each day too there is a reminder of how close this came to ending, but also how far that is away now, as long as I trust in God each day. 2 years on and I'm working again as a parish priest ... a parish priest who needs to accept fallibility daily and who knows it's through that brokenness and not despite it that he's loved. And who desperately wants to let others know the same."

PSALM 116: 1-9

- ¹ I love the LORD, because he has heard
my voice and my pleas for mercy.
- ² Because he inclined his ear to me,
therefore I will call on him as long as I live.
- ³ The snares of death encompassed me;
the pangs of Sheol laid hold on me;
I suffered distress and anguish.
- ⁴ Then I called on the name of the LORD:
"O LORD, I pray, deliver my soul!"
- ⁵ Gracious is the LORD, and righteous;
our God is merciful.
- ⁶ The LORD preserves the simple;
when I was brought low, he saved me.
- ⁷ Return, O my soul, to your rest;
for the LORD has dealt bountifully with you.
- ⁸ For you have delivered my soul from death,
my eyes from tears,

LEADER:

It is very important to remember that recovery means returning and having a new sense of belonging. Indeed recovery means the restoration of relationships – being accepted as we are, with love, cleansing, being made whole, healing bringing us together as one. It is this new making of us that restores self-esteem, motivates, inspires and stimulates us to belong and contribute to the lives of others – thus the circle is completed.

The love that leads to a sense of belonging is so fundamental to every full life – because belonging is living - and living is belonging to family, friends and community. And the corner stone of all belonging is God himself. As we grow in our relationship with Him our lives are strengthened and justified, giving us resilience, meaning and a heart. He is our rock and shield.

Whatever takes away our self-esteem or our lives, whichever mask we wear in order to assume respectability, or to hide our dependency, when the mask is removed, our true lives are revealed, lives without meaning. When hopelessness and despair close in around us, we feel His Love welcoming us, warming our hearts and restoring us.

However the eldest son would not shake hands or share in the joy of his brother's recovery. He insisted on staying outside, and kept himself apart. Recovery brings its own challenges – the restoration of one challenges the other's self-esteem. But the Father continues nonetheless to seek the recovery of all his children and his whole creation.

LEADER: LET US PRAY

We worship you O Lord, our rock and saviour for your generous and transforming love and for recognising and experiencing it in Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified and on the third day was resurrected

All: In You, the living God, we trust

Teach us not to burden ourselves with all our cares and worries but to learn to trust in You and turn our whole lives over to your tender, loving care

All: In You, the living God, we trust

We pray for each other, family, friends, neighbours, fellow members, that we may grow in a relationship of love with each other whilst deepening our relationship with You. Thus, we carry each other's burdens - sustaining and supporting each other

All: In You, the living God, we trust

We pray for our society and all those who feel the fragility of life closing in on them through unemployment, disappointments, disease, worries, fears or having followed the wrong path or death. Make us, your people, beacons of light and hope that shine even through the fragility of darkness

All: In You, the living God, we trust

LEADER:

We now come to the closing hymn of our service – the Recovery Prayer, a hymn specially composed for this service – which captures the three steps which release us to opportunity and thus to a new life, Recognizing, Arising and Contributing. The words are by Siôn Aled; and Sioned Webb has composed the tune. Bless you and thank you for your support

RECOVERY HYMN (the hymn)

When we sought your strength to free us,
from the custody of shame,
sought your light to banish darkness
and transform the night of blame:
far beyond our hopes and longings,
pure in love your answer came.

You know well how pain has power,
you know sorrow's deepest grave;
teach us to embrace our weakness,
show how suffering can save:
help us grow through hurt to healing,
as you make the broken brave.

Give us eyes that see in others,
close to giving up their fight,
those your grace can yet recover,
turn their misery to might,
welcome in the celebration
of the lost restored to light.

AMEN