

Camp Sunday Worship Resources 2024

Linked by Love
Linked by Grace

By Leslie Hobson, Director Northern Pines Camp & Retreat Center



This Camp Sunday Worship Program is based on Luke 15: 11-32, The Prodigal Son and the 2024 Camp Curriculum, **Linked by Love**. The curriculum focuses on God's love being manifest in relationships of all kinds that weave in and out of our lives. Each camp day focuses on a different Old Testament or New Testament story of a person who encounters God through a different type of relationship. For this year's worship, we have drawn heavily from curriculum Day 4 "Linked by Grace."

Story: The Prodigal Son

Scripture: Luke 15: 11-32; Specifically verse 20: *And he arose and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him.*

Theological Summary: God loves us and reaches out to us, no matter how bad things get, and invites us to do what we can to forgive and love each other.

Main Ideas:

- Be assured that God freely offers grace and love to everybody
- Learn that owning mistakes is the first step toward reconciliation
- Examine how forgiveness in action can be difficult
- Explore reconciliation as something to be celebrated

Call to Worship

Leader: This is the day.

Congregation: This is the day that the Lord has made. Let us rejoice in it!

Leader: This is the place.

Congregation: This is the place that the Lord has made. Let us rejoice in it!

Leader: Grace is the gift.

Congregation: Grace is the gift that the Lord has made. Let us rejoice in it!

All: This is the day that the Lord has made. We come today to rejoice in this place for the gifts we have been given.

Hymn Suggestion: *This is the Day* (United Methodist Hymnal - UMH #657) Sung responsively with standing/sitting and LOUD; like we do at camp!

Opening Prayer: (Adapted from the 2024 Camp Curriculum: **Linked by Love** and an opening prayer from the Long Green Valley Church of the Brethren.)

God of Grace, join us now in this special time set apart from our busy lives so that we may experience you in a new way. We come to you seeking your presence and grace. The love you have shown us in Jesus is more than we deserve. Your arms are open wide, like a waiting father for his prodigal children, ready to welcome and restore. Open us up to receive all that you have to lavish on us today. May this time of worship be a celebration of your love for us and our love for you. In the name of Christ we pray, Amen.

Hymn Suggestions: *Amazing Grace* (UMH #378) or *Amazing Grace, My Chains Are Gone* (Chris Tomlin)

Children's Message

Option 1: Needs crate paper streamer rolls and optional digital camera.

Invite children to stand in a circle, at least arm's length apart. Make the circle into a heart shape. Hand out rolls of crepe paper to a few of the children. Invite them to toss the roll across the circle, holding onto the end, so that it unrolls as it travels. The child who catches the roll will then hold onto what they caught as they toss it again. Continue this until a colorful web is formed held together by the hands of the children. Ask the children to sit down on the floor still holding on to their paper and carefully place the web on the floor. An option would be to take a photo of the group with their web to share on social media.

We are all interconnected. We all reach out to communicate or interact with others, or others reach out to us. We create a beautiful web with our interactions. When we act with love, care, and kindness as we interact, we create a beautiful web - a beautiful design of love. If we dropped the roll of crepe paper, we could pick it back up and continue to toss it. If we dropped the crepe paper, the web was still beautiful. When we make mistakes and ask for forgiveness, we keep our web of community and love going. We will learn more about that in today's Gospel lesson.

Prayer:

God, we thank you for beautiful colors. We thank you for being connected to one another. We thank you for teaching us to love and forgive. Help us to create beautiful webs of love this week. Amen

Option 2: Need a bottle of bubbles and a bubble wand.

Invite children to think of a time when they wish they had done something differently, maybe acted differently, used kinder words, or made a mistake they wish they hadn't made. Invite each child to blow a bubble and lift that thing to God. Explain that God hears us, even if we don't say things out loud. God forgives our mistakes and forgives us when we wish we had done something differently. When the bubble pops or floats out of sight, that is like God saying, "It is okay. I love you always." Have each child blow their bubble in prayer.

Prayer:

God, thank you for hearing our prayers. Thank you for your love, grace, and forgiveness. Amen

Hymn Suggestion: *Sanctuary* (The Faith We Sing - TFWS #2164) or *Humble Thyself/Awesome God* (TFWS #2131/#2040)

Pastoral Prayer

Gracious God, thank you for the ways in which you connect us in community and connect with us through the gift of Jesus. You know us when we are at our best and when we are at our worst. Forgive us when we wander away or waste the gifts you have given us. No one knows forgiveness and love better than you. Help us experience the freedom that comes with forgiveness and help us to change when we are in the wrong. You welcome us with arms wide open. Strengthen us to offer the same grace and love to those in our lives. Give us understanding for those who have hurt us and patience in our busy lives. Thank you for loving each of us unconditionally. Let us learn to go through the difficult process of forgiveness, knowing it is good and is to be celebrated. Let us be more like you, offering grace to all we meet. In the name of Christ who taught us to pray saying...

Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those

who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen.

Dakotas UM Camps Prayer

God of all creation, we are grateful for your gift to us that is Camp and Retreat Ministries. We celebrate with you for those who will attend camps this year. Watch over them as they venture away from their regular places and welcome them into new spaces to experience enriched relationships with you and with others. We also ask you to wrap your arms around the staff people who will serve in ministries of all kinds at our United Methodist campsites. Bless them with spiritual gifts to provide the greatest hospitality and safety for all who come to their sites. Inspire them to share your good news in words, action, and loving care to all who come to camp. We celebrate each of our special places set apart where campers can experience Christ, Creation, and Community. We celebrate Lake Poinsett Camp and Living Waters Retreat Center that you again might use it to provide so many with the life-giving waters that are a relationship with Jesus Christ. We celebrate Storm Mountain Center as your gift to our world where your creation can be experienced on the mountain top. We celebrate Wesley Acres Camp and Retreat Center to be a place where you bridge gaps and bring people from diverse places into sacred and beloved community. May your love and grace be felt and celebrated by all who come to camp. Amen.

Camp Minnesota Prayer

God of all creation, we are grateful for your gift to us that is Camp and Retreat Ministries. We celebrate with you for those who will attend camps this year. Watch over them as they venture away from their regular places and welcome them into new spaces to experience enriched relationships with you and with others. We also ask you to wrap your arms around the staff people who will serve in ministries of all kinds at our United Methodist campsites. Bless them with spiritual gifts to provide the greatest hospitality and safety for all who come to their sites. Inspire them to share your good news in words, action, and loving care to all who come to camp. We celebrate each of our special places set apart where campers can experience Christ, Creation, & Community. We celebrate Koronis Ministries and Camp Koronis that you would use it to provide so many with a deeper relationship with Jesus Christ. We celebrate Northern Pines Camp and Retreat Center as your gift to our world where your creation can be experienced among the tall pines. We celebrate KoWaKan Adventures to be a "Place of the Almighty" where campers can meet you in a wilderness adventure and build sacred and beloved community. May your love and grace be felt and celebrated by all who come to camp. Amen.

Scripture: Luke 15:11-32 The Prodigal Child

Message/Sermon Ideas "Linked by Grace"

*Message Insights adapted from 2024 Camp Curriculum: **Linked by Love** (Day 4)*

While this story may seem familiar, be prepared to hear it for the first time. There is a chance one of your Camp Sunday worshippers might be doing just that, and others may have heard it so many times they have stopped listening for how God might be speaking through it in a new way. There are lots of ways to approach this story, but for Camp Sunday, we want to think about the distances between people and where and how grace is offered.

Camp is a place to practice grace. It is not just about "saying grace" for a meal. Yet, each meal we eat can remind us that there are lots of things we receive that we have not worked for. Camp is full of opportunities to show grace and talk about the importance of claiming God's grace in our lives.

In the sermon/message, try to include stories from camp that are an example of campers being welcomed at camp and included in community no matter their background or previous choices. Or share stories of how campers offer forgiveness, experience grace, and show acceptance of one another, despite differences or even arguments. Stories of campers returning to camp after a time away and being welcomed and accepted just as they are can also be examples of how grace is lived out at camp. Impactful camper stories are engaging to the congregation and can bring back personal memories for those listening.

Today's scripture will reach everyone in a different way. Different people will relate to different characters in the story.

We all have an ego. So do the characters in the story. The younger brother seems to think highly of himself, demanding what was "owed to him" as his share of the inheritance. In the process, he distances himself from family. The older brother sees himself as better for having stayed and puts up a barrier between himself and those gathered to celebrate. In both cases, their ego allowed them to justify their own act of separation.

Neither son's situation is fair. At different points in the story, both felt they deserved something. The father probably had his own feelings about that too. All three of them had choices about how they would respond to the actions of others. Instead of asking what is 'fair,' Luke asks us to imagine what grace would look like at each turn. We are reminded that none of us is perfect and that we all make bad choices at times. We can give thanks that God is not about what is 'fair' but about how grace can be shared.

This story shows us the power of grace. The younger son finds the humility to admit he was wrong and returns home, closing the gap between himself and family. He receives grace from his father, who sets aside his own ego to hike up his robe and run to his returning child. The father didn't worry about how he might have enabled this child, or if others would see him as a naive or permissive parent. He just ran and covered his son in grace. Later, he goes out looking for his older son who is pulling away in frustration and indignation. The father does not yell at him and doesn't talk tough. Instead, the father begs him to offer grace. In both cases, the father tries to span the gap that has been created, setting aside his own ego and pride.

The story calls us to be humble and reflect on our own levels of responsibility. Instead of pushing others away or distancing ourselves, the story calls us to stay in relationship with each other. Sometimes we create distance because we think too little of ourselves. Sometimes we create distance because we think too much of ourselves. Either way, when we can admit our faults, we close the distances our egos have created. We can rediscover love where we might have expected judgment. We can see God manifest in the grace shared between us and know that we are never truly alone. This is good news!

Forgiveness is something we can all do. It is a personal task. Reconciliation is a more complicated process that requires the participation of another so that a relationship can be healed. For that, more than one person must find their humility, reflect on themselves, and be prepared to offer grace. First though, we must be ready to forgive. Forgiveness is something we *choose to do*; it is not easy, but it can be life changing. Forgiveness can involve looking at things from another person's perspective and having empathy or compassion. Forgiveness can involve an acknowledgement of our own role in a conflict and deciding the hurt we carry is not worth the emotional toll.

In her book, *Traveling Mercies*, Anne Lamott writes, "Not forgiving is like drinking rat poison and then waiting for the rat to die." In today's story, we see what it looks like when the work of forgiveness is done. Before the younger son can get out his apology, the father runs to him. Grace is already at work. We might assume the

same grace is already present for the older, brooding, brother as his father pleads for him to come join the party. In neither case was there a question about grace being deserved. That is the power of grace. It is not about our human standards of fairness. Grace is an unmerited gift. We receive grace by simply being humans—children of God. We are the ones who put conditions on God’s love and grace. We are the ones who let our biases and hurts dictate who we will and will not forgive. We are the ones who let our egos create distance between us and others. We create our own distance between us and God. But God continually races toward us to close the gap and meet us where we are and to offer welcome and acceptance.

Be open to where the story and the characters lead your message and congregation, but make sure that when the sermon ends everyone knows they are loved and forgiven by God and that we can choose to close the distances between each other by offering grace to one another and to all we encounter, just like it happens at camp.

Invitation to Communion

Explain that the Disciples who followed Jesus often messed up, didn’t pay attention, or didn’t remember everything Jesus told them. When he met with them in the upper room, Jesus reminded them that he would love them and include them all, no matter how bad things got. He told them to share this meal together and with others to remind each other that God would always be with them and love them, no matter what happened. Talk about how communion is a special meal of celebration and that at this table, God, like the father in Luke, welcomes us with excitement to this feast. It doesn’t matter where we come from, or what mistakes we’ve made; God is happy to see us at this table. There is always a seat for us. Now, we share that same meal and share that same message, remembering that we are all welcome at God’s table and that nothing we can do will separate us from God’s love.

Follow with a communion liturgy or practice that is appropriate for your congregation.

Invitation to Offering

One of the many ways in which churches support our conference camping program is through apportionment giving. There are also opportunities for direct gifts to specific locations, programs, or projects. We also invite you to give to local camp scholarship funds and support individuals in your congregation to attend camps. Finally, each of your conference campsites will gladly receive and faithfully use any gifts that you would like to give in support of this vital ministry. Did you know that each [Camp Minnesota / Dakotas United Methodist Camp](#) location has a Wish List of items they could really use? Perhaps consider challenging the congregation to fund one or more of those items. We invite you to give generously!

Offertory Prayer

God of grace and love, we present to you our gifts of gratitude, of hope, and of joy. May these gifts be used to bring your kingdom near on Earth. May these gifts offer love, peace, hope, and comfort to those in need in this community, this state, this country, this world. We give you gifts for our camps. We know these special places called *camp* provide a natural setting for people to experience your love, grace, and Holy Spirit in ways that only can happen at camp. We give these gifts with prayers for amazing camp experiences for all who go to camp this summer. We give generously because of the gifts you have given us, and we are grateful. Amen

Hymn Suggestion: *Trading My Sorrows* by Darrell Evans or *Lean on Me* by Bill Withers (with actions.) (Check out the link to view [Camp Medolark - Lean on Me \(last camp fire 2013\)](#) on YouTube for actions during the chorus. The video is older and a bit shaky, but the actions are shown and easy to learn.)

Benediction

Leave now with the love and grace of God fresh in your hearts.

Go with hands open to receive all God has for you.

Go with hands ready to reach out to those in need of God's love shown through you.

Amen