

“Longing for Home”

Luke 15:1-3, 11-32

The parable of the prodigal son, found in the Gospel of Luke (Luke 15:11–32), is rich with symbolism. There have been many different interpretations of this parable of Jesus and its cast of characters.

The father in the story symbolizes God's unconditional love, mercy, and forgiveness. He welcomes the younger son back with open arms despite his mistakes, illustrating God's readiness to forgive those who repent and return to Him. The father's actions highlight grace—offering forgiveness not because it is earned, but because of love.

The younger Son (aka Prodigal Son) represents humanity's tendency to stray, pursue selfish desires, and disregard God's guidance. His journey reflects the destructive consequences of sin, but also the hope of redemption. The younger son's return symbolizes repentance and the joy of reconciliation with God.

The older brother represents those who may be outwardly obedient but harbor resentment or self-righteousness. His reaction to the father's forgiveness of the younger son highlights the challenge of embracing grace and compassion for others, even when we feel we have worked harder or been more "deserving."

This parable emphasizes themes like forgiveness, grace, and the boundless love of God, while also challenging listeners to reflect on their own relationships—with God and with others. Most sermons on this story lead the listener to ask him or herself which of these characters do they find most relatable?

There is a scene at the beginning of the 1939 film version of *The Wizard of Oz*. When the film begins everything is in sepia tones not Technicolor. Dorothy Gale is a teenage girl living with her Uncle Henry and Auntie Em. She hates her life there on the farm in Kansas, in the dustbowl, in the Great Depression, so she decides to run away. She is the Prodigal Daughter.

Dorothy runs away from home and takes her dog Toto with her. Together they meet Professor Marvel who claims via his crystal ball that Aunt Em is "sick". Believing him, Dorothy heads back to the farm, but her family and

the farmhands are in the storm cellar while a twister, a tornado is bearing down on them.

The storm cellar door is locked. Dorothy runs back to home, to the house and is hit on the head by a window frame. The house is sucked up into the eye of the tornado. Finally, as we know, the house lands with a thump.

I want to take a show of hands now. How many of you ran away from home at one time or another in your life? Be honest...

We all know the rest of story; Dorothy longs to go home.

In Jesus' story in the Gospel of Luke, the Prodigal or Lost Son wants to run away from and never come back. He has no desire to come back home until that is the only thing left for him. He has squandered his inheritance. He has eaten and slept with the pigs. He has turned his back on home, his brother, his father, and God.

It is only when he hits the lowest point in his life that according to Luke, "he comes to his senses". He decides to come home. He longs for home. The prodigal's return begins in the mire of the swine pen. There he "came to himself." This pregnant phrase leaves much to the reader's imagination. The lost son reclaims his identity. No longer deserving to be called his father's son, he resolves to leave the far country and return to his own land and to his father.

The expression "he came to himself" affirms the human capacity to renounce foolish error and reclaim one's heritage and potential. The son realized that he no longer had any claim on his father's goods, and morally he no longer has the right to be called a son. But if not a son, perhaps his father will allow him to be a servant in his house (cf. John 8:35). That would be far better than the life that now enslaves him. Even his father's servants have more than enough bread to eat while he is dying of hunger. *He longs for home...*

Our *longing for home* has a number of layers of the onion to it...

First, there is *nostalgia* when we long for a romanticized view of our past, a simpler time, and a more innocent time in our lives...

Nostalgia is *fun* every now and then, but it does not give us the one thing we cannot live without in our lives—a present sense of the Father’s love and mercy for us.

Nostalgia is also *dangerous* when we try to re-create our childhoods or re-live them through our children. It is dangerous in the Church. Sometimes *nostalgia* in the Church is needlessly clinging to *traditionalism* without ever questioning why...

Second, there is also a *longing for home* in what the Quaker author Thomas Kelly writes of when he says:

“Deep within us all there is an amazing inner sanctuary of the soul, a holy place, a Divine Center, a speaking Voice to which we may continually return. Eternity is in our hearts, pressing upon our time-torn lives, warming us with intimations of an astounding destiny, calling us home unto itself. Yielding to these persuasions, gladly submitting ourselves in body and soul, utterly and completely to the Light Within is the beginning of true life.” (Thomas Kelly, *A Testament of Devotion*, p. 3)

This is a *longing for home* that is focused on living in the *present moment* and *present blessings*, focused upon seeing God’s presence and blessing here and now... It is the flip-side of nostalgia. It is forward looking. It is hopeful and grateful.

It is Dorothy finally realizing that all along that she had the power to go home. In *The Wizard of Oz* all she had to do was what? (Click her heels together 3 times and say, There’s _____.”)

It is the younger, lost, prodigal who sets off for home 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.

In our *Glory to God Hymnal* there is a hymn based upon the 23rd Psalm, *My Shepherd Will Supply My Need*. Pick up a hymnal and turn to #803 and look at verse 3 and let's read it together out loud:

The sure provisions of my God
Attend me all my days;
O may Your House be my abode,
And all my work be praise.
There would I find a settled rest,
While others go and come;
No more a stranger or a guest,
But like a child at home.

To be a child at home means to be part of a family, to share community around a table. We have all that we need in the Father's house here and now when we live in the *present moment with present blessings*.

And third, there is one more layer of the onion, another *longing for home*; it is the *longing for heaven*. Sometimes when a person dies who is a Christian we say that "they have gone to be home with the Lord". The Apostle Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 5:6-8:

So we are always confident; even though we know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord—for we walk by faith, not by sight. Yes, we do have confidence, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord.

Each day when we get up in the morning we should thank God for another day, another day to enjoy this present moment with all our present blessings. At the end of each day before we drift off to sleep we should also realize and be thankful for the *longing for our heavenly home* that we are one day closer to it! Amen.

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