

Sermon ✝ March 27, 2022
Luke 15:1-3, 11b-32
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Twenty days ago, Mary and I observed our 50th wedding anniversary . . . an accomplishment for which Mary deserves some kind of a medal.

Through the years, I've dragged her all over the place. We've lived in three different states and a Canadian province. In big cities and small towns.

And while each of these communities has been very different, there has been at least one common thread. Within each locale, there have always been people (usually, but not always, life-long residents) who have spoken to me about how dull or uninteresting they have found their particular city or town. These are the folks who long to live somewhere else, almost anywhere else, as long as it's not where they are presently residing. It is, of course, what we might call the *grass-is-greener-on-the-other-side-of-the-fence syndrome*.

In many ways, there is a lot of truth in the old adage, "*There is no place like home.*" Home is the one place where we can find sameness and serenity in a world that is full of noise and confusion.

Our Gospel lesson is that much-loved parable we know as the Parable of the Prodigal Son. And I believe that it really does have something profound to say to us about this matter of wandering from home in search of something beyond our backyard . . . only to one day return and find it to be the place for which we have long searched.

The late Henri Nouwen was a leading writer on Christian spirituality. He said that the story of the prodigal son is a story about returning. That is what makes it the ideal parable for the Lenten season.

For we all have the need to return to God over and over again. In the course of our days and weeks, our lives just seem naturally to drift away from God. Our minds wander from God as we get caught up in the problems and concerns of everyday living.

It is at this point that our "*Old Adam*" often takes over. It is a term used to describe our sinful self. "*Old Adam (and Eve)*" depict the human condition that said "*No*" to God in the story of the Garden of Eden. Christ is the "*new*" Adam who came to free humanity from its sinful self . . . and to restore the ways of the garden.

But we often forget about Jesus and God and fall prey to the wants the "*Old Adam and Old Eve*" that is within us all.

We need to return to God. We must return to God if we are to find any peace in living. Returning to God is a lifelong struggle that needs to be renewed each Lenten season. To help

us through this season, we have been given this wonderful story about a father and his sons.

Home of an apparently successful farmer and landowner. The younger son asks for his share of the inheritance. Under Jewish law, the elder son would receive 2/3 (leaving, in this instance, younger son with 1/3). In some cases, as he grew older, the father might hand over property to eldest son before his death. In this instance, however, the request came from the younger son. He literally could not wait for his father to die.

He wasted his money (prodigal means wasteful). It got so bad for him that he was forced to feed pigs, (Jewish law: *"Cursed is he who feeds swine."*) When he finally came to his senses, he decided to return home.

To his amazement he is greeted by his father with open arms. Some call this the story of the "loving father". And it's really a more accurate description of what takes place.

Despite the pain this father must have felt, his forgiveness was so complete and unconditional that he did not hesitate to embrace his lost son instantly. The point Jesus was making in this parable is that our Father in heaven is like the father of the prodigal son.

Again, Henri Nouwen: *"God does not require a pure heart before embracing us . . . even if we return to God only because our desires have failed to bring us happiness, God will always take us back . . . even if we return simply because we could not make it on our own, God will take us back."*

When God extends the gift of new life to you and to me, we need to let go of the past (the old Adam or Eve) once and for all.

Genuine reconciliation and healing can become a reality only when we are able to forgive totally and set aside that which others have done to hurt us.

The Story of the prodigal son assures us that God is always looking for us . . . always waiting to greet us with a kiss.

And our God waits for us with endless patience, hoping that we will come back so that we may return to God the love that has been shared with us.

As we continue our Lenten journey, may we hear God's voice . . . for it is truly amazing grace . . . and it sounds ever so sweet. Amen.