

Have you ever heard the saying, “You can never go home again”?

There have been a few times in my life when this saying rang true.

The first time was when I came home from college for my first summer break.

Now that was an adjustment.

I had spent an entire year making my own decisions and setting my own priorities,  
and suddenly I was back in my old room,

back in the child role,

finding it difficult to accept the limitations and supervision that I had  
shed while away at school.

Things just weren't the same.

I was resistant to being home.

I also have felt it when I go back to my old community.

My husband Tim's church is only a 1/2hour from where I grew up,  
and when we are up there, sometimes I just take a drive out in the country,  
and always end up driving by our old house  
(which my parents sold about 20 years ago now)

and I don't know why I do it, because it is always the same result.

I end up frustrated and angry

and murmuring to myself about the

terrible state of the property,

and how those new owners could let the house deteriorate to such a state.

In the first example, I didn't want to go home.

In the second instance,

I wanted to go home, but I was longing for an idyllic home that no longer existed,  
or perhaps never existed except in my own mind.

John Ed Pearce said, “

Home is a place you grow up wanting to leave, and grow old wanting to get back to.

In both instances, what I have come to realize is I couldn't go home again,  
not because home was that different, but because I was different.

Can you imagine how the younger brother must have felt as he walked back to his childhood home?

If anyone had reason to believe that he could never go home again, it was him.

He certainly did not leave on the best of terms.

In fact, by asking for his father's inheritance before his father's death,  
it was the same as telling his father to “drop dead”

and to make it worse,

he was not even entitled to the inheritance,  
the eldest son was.

Now we are not sure why his father agreed to his outrageous and selfish request,  
but he did.

And as soon as the son had money in hand,

he runs off to “live it up” without another thought of his family or his home.

And he doesn't seem to have any guilt or regrets until his luck runs out...

It is only when the money is gone, and things get tough, that he starts to think about home and his father's love.

Does that sound familiar?

How many times do we go through our daily lives without thinking about God at all?

How many times do we rely on ourselves; wasting not only our time but also our talents and treasures?

The word prodigal means “wasteful”

How often do we neglect our relationship with God, throw away God's love, without giving it another thought?

That is until our luck runs out and things get tough, and then suddenly, we turn to God.

Even those of us who seem to “have it all together”

even those of us who come to church every week,

even we have our moments when we waste what we have been given.

Have our moments when we are “lost” and don't even know it.

Even though we might like to see ourselves as the older son,

the one who is faithful and committed to the Father,

the truth is that every one of us is a combination of both sons;

sometimes faithful, sometimes lost and wasteful.

But the main point of this story is not about our nature,

it is about God's nature.

The good news in the story is that our God is like the Father in this story.

A father who loves us so much that we are welcomed home no matter what.

The parable says that the father “ran” to meet his son.

At that time, grown men did not run.

It was a sign of weakness, of disgrace.

But here we hear that the Father was willing to DISGRACE himself, in order to offer GRACE to his son.

GRACE is undeserved love.

Grace is an open-armed God who doesn't just wait for us to come home, but instead is already on the road, running to greet and receive us.

Where human relationships are involved, there may be times when we “can't go home again”

there may be times when our human connections are so broken that they cannot be restored, but this is never true with God.

With God, we can always go home.

With God, home is as close as our own hearts,

because the Holy Spirit lives in us.

Jesus said that he would come and abide with us...live in us.

God has come and made a home with us and in us.  
We do not have to “find God”  
God has already “found us”  
when we are lost and searching, God is already there.  
Beckoning us to come home to ourselves and come home to God.

What a great comfort... especially in those times when we feel like the younger son,  
lost and alone.

But grace is a funny thing.  
When we are the ones receiving it,  
we love grace.  
We think it's a great concept.  
We love that no matter how much we mess up, we will be forgiven and welcomed home.

But it is not so palatable when it is someone else receiving the grace.  
Too often, when we see ourselves as the older son, we don't like grace so much.  
When someone else is getting what we think they don't deserve, we get angry and resentful,  
suddenly it doesn't seem fair,  
and we find grace offensive.

But you see, that's the point.  
Grace is not fair.  
And thank God it's not.  
Because if God acted out of fairness instead of mercy,  
we would all be permanently LOST.

there is not one of us who is not in need of God's grace.  
All of us need the grace-filled arms of the Father to welcome us home;  
regardless of whether we deserve it or not.

that seems to be something that we can all celebrate together then.

That God's grace and mercy is limitless,  
and God rejoices when each of us returns home.  
No matter how many times that homecoming is necessary,  
God never tires of running to embrace us and welcome us home.  
It doesn't matter if we have been away for years or minutes,  
God's welcome remains the same.  
Today God says to you, “welcome home, child”

amen