



LESSONS for LIFE

MARCH 29, 2009 11:00 a.m.
8 LIFE CHANGING LESSONS FROM JESUS
FROM LOST TO FOUND
Rev. Dr. Brent Hawkes, C.M.

SACRED READINGS

Lesson: LUKE 15: 11 - 16

Gospel: LUKE 15: 17 - 24

This morning at the nine o'clock service when I gave the explanation of what was going on with me this week in preparation for this sermon, the congregation almost totally misunderstood me. Folks came up to me after the service and said, "Brent, you had no need to apologize for your sermon this morning." I was NOT apologizing for my sermon this morning! It is not my fault that God doesn't do what God is supposed to do. What I was trying to say this morning was that sometimes sermons come easily and sometimes it's a challenge. Sometimes it could be something during the week that really sparks it and gets it going and other times it's work and work and work and just doesn't seem to come. And some days, like last week, it can be Saturday morning – on the treadmill when finally God wakes up and gets the message across. Well, it didn't happen this week until this morning at five minutes to even and I had literally nothing of inspiration after all of the struggle and the work in preparation for this morning. And so this morning three phrases came and that didn't leave much time to work with it in preparation for the service. So, it isn't my fault. If you want to deal with God about it – feel free to do so. I will deal with it later. You can be thankful that this evening someone else will be preaching on this text so you'll probably have a bit more to work with if God gets working.

And so this morning something came and where I was struggling this week is that this is a familiar scripture: the story of the prodigal son and there are some powerful messages here that are kind of the usual messages – and there are three or four different places in this story where a preacher can really go and be able to share some exciting things; but all week long – what kept coming to me was – that I was to do something different with it and not to do what I might ordinarily have done. So I kept thinking – what is that different thing and how is the different look for this gospel reading? The three phrases that came this morning were: first of all – the courage to leave home. Often when we look at this story the young man gets blamed. Now he made some mistakes along the way but maybe leaving home was not the mistake. Maybe leaving home was exactly the right thing to do; and if I might take a little liberty with the story, maybe he was a gay man raised on the family farm in a rural area needing to go to the big city to find himself. Maybe for him leaving home was exactly the right thing to do.

Growing up in a small town in New Brunswick, not on a family farm, but with family farms all around me, I – very early on – new that I was gay but couldn't sort of put the names, the labels, the terminology around it and certainly didn't realize there was a community, that there were other folks. I just knew that the day would come when I would have to leave home. I just knew that this was not going to be the place for me to grow up in. I'd been raised in a strict Baptist church; it was a wonderful place in which to grow up and I learned a lot in my days at that Baptist church but I also quickly learned that it would not be my church home for ever, that I would not be able to stay there. Today I can say that I am very thankful that I'm gay because I really worry about what I would have become if I had remained closeted and stayed in that church. Would I have become another Jimmy Swaggart or Jerry Falwell, hiding –



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and I'm not saying necessarily that they're gay – but God will deal with them one way or another. I think God has already dealt with Jimmy Swaggart – but anyway... . It was also a challenge for me in terms of leaving home because my family had started a small family business, a grocery store that they had built, and my Dad many times in my growing up years said to me that he was so excited to build the business that he could hand over to me and that he really wanted me to carry on the family business and I knew well before I told him that I knew it would not be possible for me because I knew I had to leave home. The sad thing was that my sister Nancy is one year younger than me and she would have given anything for Dad to say to her, "Nancy, I'm building this family business for you," because she had the knack and the desire to take over that business but because I was one year older and probably – for Dad for of the issue – I was a man and that's where he wanted the family business to go. And how often does gender get in the way of justice?

This morning I'm sharing it and Kathy was telling me about her growing up experience and how – when it came time for some of the family things to be given away – Kathy got the family dishes when she really wanted the family tools! (laughter). I said to Kathy, "I got what I wanted. I got the family dishes." (more laughter). Fortunately for me my academic ability became the door for me to leave home and when I went off to university it was a terrifying experience, having come from a small town, to go off to university but it was the right thing to do. For some of you it has taken courage for you to leave home. For some of you, gay or not, you were expected to stay home and take care of your parents and yet you made the more difficult decision that you had to live your life and it was right for you to move on. For some of you it's taken courage to leave a relationship; you may have worked hard to see if it would work but you may have discovered it wasn't you or for you and it took courage to leave that relationship and to go to a new land; and for some of you it now takes courage to be able to let go of a relationship that you have lost and for which you are still grieving and it may be time now to let go and travel to a new land; courage to leave home. Secondly, courage now to find your new home and in some cases it may be the courage to go back to your family of birth, to go back and to give that family and that relationship a second chance; the courage to risk again and to try to re-build the bond that may have gotten lost. But for many people the courage to find home is not the courage to go home. For many of us the courage to find home has been to re-create home again with – instead of just a birth family – to re-create home again with a chosen family, to gather around you people that will be that new home for you. And what are the key elements for that new home? Certainly a place of safety, a safe place to land; certainly a place of love where you can give and receive love; certainly a place to grow and develop and where people will love you enough to challenge you to grow and love you enough to let you grow.

In 1976 I heard about MCC and decided to come here one weekend to meet the Pastor and to experience the church. At that time MCC Toronto was meeting at Holy Trinity Anglican church, renting their facilities and having evening services and I remember walking into the church for that service. It was a strange building for me but I knew it was home, and I cried and I cried and I cried. Since then MCC has gotten much wiser and like any family there are bound to be family quarrels from time to time. There may be times when the quarrels are so severe that people leave home for awhile, but I hope that you know that should there be those family quarrels that impact you that you're welcome to come back home and to be part of the family that God is forming in this place; the courage to leave home, the courage to find or create home and finally the courage to offer home to others. It's so tempting when you find that place when you create your own home, it's so tempting then to close it off and want to keep it all to yourself. A part of the Christian faith is that we own nothing. We are stewards of everything that has been given to our care so that even the home you own or you have created you do



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not own. You are a steward of that home, so how can you open that home to others? How can you create safe space for others? It may be an evening when you invite someone to dinner and they experience safety or even sanctuary in your home; and how can we in this church offer a safe home to others? Certainly we can do it through the web-casting by opening up our church to others, but there are other ways in which we can create that kind of safety. For many of us this is home, this is our spiritual home. For many of us this is our most important home and here we have found family, our chosen family. We are very grateful to have found this place and to be a part of this place but now we are called to give it away. We give it away in different ways: by making sure that we welcome people who enter this building; by making sure it's a safe place for people to heal, a safe place for people to wrestle with ideas; a safe place for people to express doubts; a safe place to differ with each other; by making sure it's a relevant place; by making changes so that our worship is accessible to a variety of different people. Lots of people have been alienated by church and have left their church home and they need to know that here we will welcome them and that here we say, *welcome home*.

I want to conclude by talking about a different kind of homecoming. In many black churches they talk about death or funerals as homecoming and I love the imagery of that for I do believe that at birth we come from God; we come from that spiritual source and through death we return back home again to that source to continue on our spiritual journey. This week Chantal Remeny died and we had her homecoming funeral yesterday here at our church. The name may not ring a bell with many of you but if you've been around for awhile you will know Chantal from seeing her pictures on the bulletin board as is our custom when someone passes away. And so yesterday we celebrated her "homecoming." And that's another part of the metaphor or imagery of this story and it's that we leave our source and we go out into the world and yes – sometimes we go out into the world and we make mistakes – and sometimes we make awful mistakes and yet God welcomes us with open arms and God celebrates when we come back home again.

This sermon has been titled: 8 Life-Changing Messages from Jesus, and certainly, I think the first four have given us some good stuff to think about and wrestle with as we've been challenged to move from where we are to where God wants us to be. Today's sermon talks to us about moving from that place of being lost to being found or to be home and I would challenge you this morning that whatever that lost place is that you may be experiencing now to challenge you to take the responsibility to not stay in that lost place, to not get mired in the muck but to take responsibility for finding your way back home again. And you know, it may be like a labyrinth; sometimes you may have to wander around and you may hit a dead end but may you be wise enough to turn. Sometimes you may go to a place and you may need the courage to leave and along the way may you be blessed enough and courageous enough to find home and have enough courage to share it with others.

Amen.