

xSermon for 27 March 2022 @ Bethesda UMC/Baltimore  
Fourth Sunday in Lent/UMCOR Sunday  
Scriptures: Joshua 5:9-12; Palm 32 (UM766); 2 Corinthians 5:16- 21; Luke  
15:1-3, 11b-32

### ***“Coming home”***

Following our simulation of a retreat, we come this Sunday to a turn-around, or revelation, called “the prodigal Son.”

What today’s scriptures do is, this fourth Sunday in Lent, to ask us to feel the mood of regret that always arrives, sooner or later, as we face life on our own.

Home looks better than it once did. As discussion material, Scripture starts with Joshua’s famous follow-through on Moses’ leadership. Just as his job was to get the Israelites to grow up and claim their rescue from Egyptian slavery, so our job is to claim our freedom to make something of our lives.

Then the Bible adds a song to support us: “Happy are those whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.” This is pretty tough talk, no matter how young or old we are ... and it hits at Lent’s theme harder than the first three Sundays. I think it presents an intimacy that makes us mad ... I mean God does .. and that humans are forever trying to blame for everything from evil to misfortune ... and gives all kinds of arguments against God, that we use constantly against one another and, actually, against ourselves.

Then we see a side of church it scares us to believe. I like to put it in the mouths of other religions, or the non-religious, because we’re so tempted to claim it for Jesus’ friends, whereas his main point is always human universality. God is in the heart of the sinner. God gets through evil clear to the other side. God is in the thick of the muck. I hesitate to quote any of the great phrases in Paul’s letter, because they all encourage us to be proud of ourselves, when all we’ve learned is how to accept help.

Which gets us to the Prodigal Son. There comes a time in our retreat, every year, when we just want to run home. This year I think it’s worse than usual. I’ve never known us to have such terrific examples: So many arguments, such unequal sides, such grand stacks of plain old ugliness and danger. “He would gladly have filled himself with the pods that the pigs were eating; and no one gave him anything.”

I can’t take that personally. That’s your problem, not mine.

I can’t stop myself. I grew up that way.

Who am I to stand up here and tell you what to do?

The situation is just too far gone for me to help in.

And the clincher: The old daddy and the elder brother out there in the yard arguing, business unfinished.....

That's the bread and the wine.

That's what's left of the news.

Some of us have turned around and now we're headed home.

Makes you want to sit down and think. Maybe wait for the Spirit to move.

Jesus!

Amen.