

## Coming Home to Where Mercy Becomes Flesh



Referring to Rembrandt's, "The Return of the Prodigal Son," [Henri Nouwen](#) writes, "The true center of Rembrandt's painting is the hands of the father. On them all light is concentrated; on them the eyes of the bystanders are focused; in them mercy becomes flesh; upon them forgiveness, reconciliation, and healing come together, and, through them, not only the tired son, but also the worn-out father find their rest."

The greater insight though, comes from one of Henri Nouwen's friends, [Sr. Sue Mosteller](#), who comments, "Whether you (see yourself as) the younger son or the elder son, you have to realize that you are called to become the father."

Opportunities to "become the father" from this story abound for us during this season of Lent.

## **Luke 15: 11-32**

**11** Jesus continued: “There was a man who had two sons. **12** The younger one said to his father, ‘Father, give me my share of the estate.’ So he divided his property between them.

**13** “Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living. **14** After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. **15** So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. **16** He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one made a move to give him anything.

**17** “When he came to his senses, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired servants have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! **18** I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. **19** I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired servants.’ **20** So he got up and went to his father.

“But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.

**21** “The son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’

**22** “But the father said to his servants, ‘Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. **23** Bring the fattened calf and butcher it. Let’s have a feast and celebrate. **24** For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’ So they began to celebrate.

**25** “Meanwhile, the elder son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. **26** So he called one of the servants and asked him what was going on. **27** ‘Your brother has come,’ he replied, ‘and your father has butchered the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.’

**28** “The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him. **29** But he answered his father, ‘Look! All these years I’ve been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. **30** But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!’

**31** “‘My son,’ the father said, ‘you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. **32** But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’”

## FOR REFLECTION

1. For many in the LGBTQ community, the journey of understanding and acknowledging one's gender identity and/or sexual orientation can be similar to a feeling of being "lost." If you experienced such lostness, how did you "*come to your senses*?" Who helped you and what animated you to "return home" and own your LGBTQ identity and dignity?
2. When you "returned home" as an LGBTQ person or ally, was there someone amongst your circle of family and friends who "received and welcomed" you in the spirit of the father in this parable? What form did that welcome take? Why do you think this person (or persons) was most welcoming of you?
3. Beyond sexual orientation or gender identity issues, have you ever felt trapped in a situation of shame or regret that seemed too great to overcome? What prevented you from going home? What finally made you decide to do so?
4. Have you ever exemplified the "father's" healing love and forgiveness for someone? What was that experience like? Is there someone currently who needs you to take on that role?
5. As an LGBTQ person or ally, who does the "elder son" represent for you? How do you extend a hand to the "elder sons" in your life or family who would prefer that you be "absent" or figuratively "dead?" How do you explain the "father's" love to an "elder son"?

## PRAYER



### **Psalm 23**

Yahweh, you are my shepherd  
I lack nothing.

You let me lie down in green pastures and lead me besides restful waters  
You guide me along the right path, true to your name  
Even if I should walk in the valley of darkness, no evil would I fear  
You are there with your rod and staff -  
and these comfort me.

You have prepared a banquet for me  
You anoint my head with oil  
Only goodness and mercy shall follow me  
as I dwell in the house of Yahweh  
all the days of my life.