

Welcome Home

Luke 15:1-3, 11b-32

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United Memorial Church

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You don't hear of me in that story that was just read did you?

I am Lydia, the mother of those two boys.

Those two very different boys... Nathaniel the eldest and Zachary, the child of our old age...

And of course, I am a wife, Simon's wife...

I want to tell you a little bit more of the story...

Do you have children?

So you know how different they can be....

One who never gives a moment of trouble... and another who constantly asks questions about everything...

I think my second child was born with the word "Why" on his lips.

In the early years it was easy to answer his questions.

When I look back, they were pretty easy questions...

Why does the sun rise everyday?

Where does it go at night?

Why does the moon disappear sometimes and shines so brightly other times?

Why do we not eat the meat of pigs?

As he got older, the questions were impossible to answer...

Why do I have to work in the fields, I want to write a story...

Why can't I go to the next town to find some more musicians...

Why do you want me to take a wife...

Ach.... Questions, questions and more questions.... I tell you it drove me crazy some days...

Of course it was worse because my eldest son loved to work in the fields, he gladly and willingly went out with my husband in the morning and came back singing at the end of the day...

He loved this land and all that it took to work it...

He was eager to take a wife and begin a family of his own.

He never dreamed of far off places... or things that couldn't be....

But our youngest son did... and eventually we couldn't keep him home anymore.

He told me that he was going to ask his father for his inheritance and start travelling....

I told him that Simon would never do it.

After all, he was the youngest son.... Not really entitled to much of anything except a place in the family home.

But he persisted.... My goodness, once he got an idea in his head there was no shaking it...

And he eventually wore my husband down, he sold some of our cattle and gave him the money and said, **"You are no longer my son."**

When I heard those words, my heart broke... how could he no longer be our son...

I had carried him under my heart, nursed him from my breast... I could not deny his existence.

I argued with Simon... my heart was breaking... but as the days and weeks and months and years passed, I saw how Simon's heart was breaking too...

He never said anything to me... but he had a look in his eyes that told me how much he missed hearing the music and laughter that Zachary brought into our home....

He still worked in the fields and planned with Nathaniel and looked after our tenants as he always did... but it was as if he was forcing himself to put one foot in front of the other every day.

He was sad...

I knew Simon often waited by the gate of our property... looking down the road as if he expected our son to appear one day...

He never told me that he did... but you know... a wife always knows...

He would come in and I could tell how troubled he was... he missed him...

Even though his daydreaming ways used to annoy him... and his music and laughter when he was supposed to be working used to anger him...

But he missed him... and I watched my husband grow older and thinner... it was as if he was diminishing before my very eyes...

It was hard... even though we still had so much to be thankful for...

Bountiful crops, family and neighbours who were there in times of joy and celebration... and also who were there when the barn burned down...

Yahweh and the rituals of the temple...

But there was something missing in our world...

Our son... our youngest son...

I knew that my husband asked all the travellers if they had seen him....

But it seemed as if nobody had...

And as the days turned to months and years... we thought he was lost to us forever...

We didn't speak his name... it was too painful... and still, we each whispered his name in the quiet...

Be safe my child, be safe...

One day, I watched in secret as Simon stood by the gate... and I saw something that I never expected to see!

My husband, a dignified elder of the temple... no longer a young man... running down the road like a young gazelle!

He had picked up his robes and I could even see his bare feet as if he raced down the road.

Feet flying faster than since he was a boy!

I didn't know what was going on...

And then... and then.... I saw a small figure off in the distance, dressed in rags... and dirty and skinny... and I realized it was Zachary!

And Simon was running down the road to meet him... his arms were held wide open... and he embraced him and wept... this time tears of joy....

Zachary knelt down in the dust and told his father how sinful he had been.... And he tried to tell his father that all he wanted was a place as one of the hired hands...

But Simon would have none of that... he called for a servant to bring a robe and sandals... and a ring that named him as one of our sons...

And called me to tell the servants to start preparing for a feast...

And we did...

But it seems that nothing is perfect...

Our eldest son heard music and laughter and asked one of the servants what was going on... When he found out that there was a celebration in honour of Zachary's return... he became angry... and I think jealous...

He went to see his father and told him that it wasn't fair... that he had been loyal and hard working all these years and he didn't even get a young goat for a celebration with his friends...

But Zachary... for him, a prized fat calf was killed...

I think Nathaniel knew he was being unreasonable... after all, he had had his father's trust and goodwill all his life... but still he didn't want to join the celebration.

Simon tried to explain this to him... he said, "Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found."

Lost and been found... Dead and come back to life...

That is how I felt... a part of my heart had come back to life with the appearance of Zachary...

I asked Nathaniel if he recalled how our scriptures told us to welcome the stranger... how that God often came in the guise of a stranger.

If we could welcome a stranger, we could welcome a lost son back to our home...

I don't think Nathaniel was convinced right away... but as the weeks and months passed, he saw that Zachary wasn't trying to take Nathaniel's place...

In fact, he began to realize that he had missed Nathaniel too... that part of his heart had been missing...

Your Christian scriptures call this the story of the Prodigal Son... but really it is more about my husband... the welcome he gave, the love he poured out... on both sons... a well that never will run dry...

I am an old woman now... and Simon is long since dead... but not before he saw both of our boys get married and begin to raise their own families...

We still talk sometimes about the day Zachary came home... about the joy and celebration of all the family together...

We all learned something that day...

Now that Nathaniel has children of his own, he understands that a son or a daughter is always a part of you... no matter what they have done or where they have been...

Zachary learned that he got another chance...

My husband learned that his heart was stronger than his dignity...

And me, I learned that sorrow doesn't last forever... that which is lost can be found again... that there are no limits to love.

And thank God for those lessons!