

“Someone to Come Home To”

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Luke 4:1-13

I officiated at a funeral a while ago. I was not acquainted with the one who had died, except later through the family's stories, but they were in need of a pastor, and when asked I always do my best to step in. I confess I was tired when the call came on Thursday. It wasn't that I didn't want to do it, it had just been a long week already. Even so, I picked up the phone to arrange for a time to meet and I made the call. I wasn't sorry.

Later, I pulled into the driveway where the family was gathered. We sat down around the kitchen table where they pushed across to me a pile of letters now 75 years old. "POW Letters" is what the box had been labeled. His daughters thought they were 'personal' --- between their mother and their dad and so they had never read them before. Those now faded pages hold every piece of official correspondence she received from the moment his plane went down over Italy until he finally came home.

Jim flew with the Royal Air Force for he was a Canadian citizen first. When his plane was shot down, he and his cohorts survived. They hid out for a while before they were captured, but part of the wonder of his story is that this young man refused to stay imprisoned ... For in fact, Jim was captured not once, but three times, escaping twice, every time doing all he could to make his way to the Allied front line - trying to make his way towards home. The story goes that he slept in a cornfield during the day, navigating his way through unfamiliar countryside by night. They were tended by an Italian woman who made sure they didn't starve. No, he didn't make it home until the war ended.

So as I heard this remarkable story and now as I turn to the first Sunday in Lent, I am struck by the truth that Jim experienced something of 'wilderness'. Oh there are times of 'wilderness' which life thrusts us into without our choosing, but at least for me, even those very dark, or very despairing or even very painful times have not been especially life threatening. At least not yet. I know your wilderness journey is unique to you and I wonder how Jesus' experience in the wilderness resonates with you.

Still, as I recall this one story I found myself thinking of how it is that we get through such times. And I wonder if it isn't always by remembering that we have something, we have Someone to come home to. And I wonder if that wasn't exactly what sustained Jesus during his sojourn into the wilderness... particularly as he faced down the three temptations which confronted him as he ended those forty days. For the "Home" Jesus had in God was one where the "bread" that sustains is so much more than that which we nourish our physical bodies. And the "Home" which Jesus had was one where the values didn't rest on strength or power, but on servant-hood. And the "Home" that Jesus called his own was not one where the relationship should ever be 'tested,' but was one that was already long proven --- one grounded in and shaped by love. It doesn't need testing!

And so I wonder now how it is that you and I take this story (and Jim's) as a gift for our time in the wilderness

In this first week of Lent, as we turn our faces toward whatever this forty-day place holds for us, we would do well to have that name Beloved echoing in our own ears—to enter into the terrain of this season

with the knowledge that we, too, are the beloved of God as we cross with Christ into the landscape of Lent and into the mystery that lies ahead.

“Beloved Is Where We Begin” writes Jan Richardson from her book “Circle of Grace” “If you would enter into the wilderness, do not leave without hearing who you are: Beloved, named by the One who has traveled this path before you. I cannot promise this blessing will free you from danger, from fear, from hunger or thirst, from the scorching of sun or the fall of the night.

But I can tell you that you will know the strange graces ... that fly to meet us bearing comfort and strength, that come alongside us for no other cause than to lean themselves toward our ear and with their curious insistence whisper in our ear our name: Beloved! My Beloved!”

I buried a veteran that day who survived the sort of wilderness most of us cannot begin to imagine. No, Jim didn't make it home until the war ended --- they were captured time and again --- but through it all, he kept trying.

Sitting at that kitchen table and hearing Jim's story I wondered out loud “I wondered how he could endure that whole Prisoner Of War thing! I recall it was his grandson who said to me, "He had someone to come home to.”

In the wilderness Jim kept his heart and mind on 'home' and on the one waiting for him there. Finally, he came home. Jesus never doubted that God provided a home for him. Perhaps it is simply ours to do the same. Amen