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Lent 4C
Peace, Seattle
March 6, 2015
Luke 15:1-3, 11b-32

WHERE DO YOU STAND?

The story is told in a series of scenes, each of which opens a whole world for us to enter.

- The younger son's demand, his journey, his fall;
- his coming to himself and his turn toward home;
- the unexpected welcome by the father, the feast;
- the older son's complaint, the father's plea, the unfinished ending.

The parable, as Jesus tells it to a mixed audience of saints and sinners, invites us inside the story. There are no dispassionate observers here. No, the tale compels us to name that character, to find that place where we would stand.

In different seasons of our lives, of course, we may find ourselves drawn to different characters or places. (There have been times in my life when I've walked in the shoes of both of the sons. Now days I find myself drawn more and more to stand with the father.)

Perhaps your entry point has not been through any of the main characters but through one of the supporting cast members in the story.

Or maybe you've felt the need to add a new character to the story in order to fully enter it—the sister; or the mother.

Where do you find yourself in the story this morning?

We're going to move away from the customary sermon today and take time to share with one another on this parable.

The way we're going to do that is by using the discussion guide, so please take it out.

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LUKE 15 PARABLE DISCUSSION GUIDE

- Gather in groups of 4-6 with others in your vicinity
- Introduce yourselves to one another

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- Where do find yourself in the story this morning? Which character or scene of the story do you connect with at this time of your life?

- If you could add a character(s) to the story, who would it be? (E.g. Mother? Sister? Other?) What contribution would that character make?

- The parable ends with the father pleading for the elder son to join the celebration. If you could write the next paragraph, what would happen?

- Jesus tells this parable in response to criticisms about his welcoming of sinners. What is the main point Jesus is trying to get across in the story?

Reflecting on this parable, Henri Nouwen writes:

> The farther I run away from the place where God dwells, the less I am able to hear the voice that calls me Beloved, and the less I hear that voice, the more entangled I become in the manipulations and power games of the world.

- Share your perspectives on Nouwen's insight.

> People who have come to know the joy of God do not deny the darkness, but they choose not to live in it. They claim that the light that shines in the darkness can be trusted more than the darkness itself…They point each other to flashes of light here and there, and remind each other that they reveal the hidden but real presence of God.

- Where do you see the hidden but real presence of God?

After discussion…

I close this time with a final quote from Nouwen.

"For most of my life I have struggled to find God, to know God, to love God. I have tried hard to follow the guidelines of the spiritual life—pray always, work for others, read the Scriptures—and to avoid the many temptations to dissipate myself. I have failed many times but always tried again, even when I was close to despair.

Now I wonder whether I have sufficiently realized that during all this time God has been trying to find me, to know me, and to love me. The question is not "How am I to find God?" but "How am I to let myself be found by him?" The question is not "How am I to know God?" but "How am I to let myself be known by God?" And, finally, the question is not "How am I to love God?" but "How am I to let myself be loved by God?" God is looking into the distance for me, trying to find me, and longing to bring me home."[1]

[1] Henri J.M. Nouwen, *The Return of the Prodigal Son: A Story of Homecoming.* 1994.