

Reconciliation ~ March 14, 2010

Joshua 5;9-12; II Corinthians 5;16-21; Luke 15:1-3, 11b-32

Have you ever felt so hurt or upset by another person that you have resolved to sever all ties? Upon reflecting on what had happened, have you ever realized that what occurred was not as earthshaking as you had thought at the time? That, perhaps, you were just at a stage in your life when you could not handle another thing and that a particular incident was the proverbial “icing on the cake?” Or, perhaps that your ego or sense of self-importance had been stepped on and that the almighty “I” needed to come before anything else, even a cherished relationship or friendship? If this has happened to you, you are human. It happens to most of us to a greater or lesser extent.

Difficult events in life help us realize that, as Robert Burns said, “The “best laid plans of mice and men gang aft agley.” When this happens we need to reflect and decide what has the most value to us and move forward, knowing that we have another chance to get things right.

The late Henri Nouwen penned a little prayer that reminds us of this: He wrote:
(Henri Nouwen from [A Cry For Mercy](#))

O Lord, life passes by swiftly. Events that a few years ago kept me totally preoccupied have now become vague memories; conflicts that a few months ago seemed so crucial in my life now seem futile and hardly worth the energy; inner turmoil that robbed me of my sleep only a few weeks ago has now become a strange emotion of the past; books that filled me with amazement a few days ago now do not seem as important; thoughts which kept my mind captive only a few hours ago, have now lost their power and have been replaced by others.

Why is it so hard to learn from this insight? Why am I continuously trapped by a sense of urgency and emergency? Why do I not see that you are eternal, that your kingdom lasts forever, and that for you a thousand years are like one day? O Lord, let me enter into your presence and there taste the eternal, timeless, everlasting love with which you invite me to let go of my time bound anxieties, fears, preoccupations, and worries. “Seek first the kingdom,” you said, “and all these other things will be given you as well.” All that is time bound will show its real meaning when I can look at it from the place where you want me to be, the place of undying love.

Lord, teach me your ways and give me the courage to follow them. Amen

That is one of my favorite prayers. It speaks of reconciliation with ourselves and with others and with our God.

Our parable for this morning, found only in the gospel of Luke, known to many as “The Prodigal Son,” speaks of this reconciliation. It speaks of coming from that place of “undying love.” The father in our little story is, of course, God, the sons are God’s beloved children. The love God has for all God’s creatures is shown through the love the father has for the wayward son, as well as for the son who was the “good one”—the one who stayed at home and grew to resent his younger brother. Those of us who are

parents understand the love we have for our children that sustains them and us through the tough times.

I have a daughter who was much like “the prodigal son.” After a brief time at college, she decided to take off and live with another young woman way across the state. She never asked me for one-third of her inheritance, knowing that it would not be much, but also believing that she could make a life for herself on her own. For a while I did not know just where she was. I pondered the wisdom of her decision and was concerned for her.

After several months, when I knew where she was living, I took a load of furniture I wasn’t using to her—all the way across the state. Wisconsin is a tad larger than Connecticut so the trip took an entire day going and coming. The apartment she was sharing was large and well-kept and not in a bad neighborhood. However, on the porch attached to the apartment, there was apparently some sort of animal sacrifice or slaughter that took place. This was the work of previous tenants. They had kept chickens out there. There was a faded but distinct odor of what had happened. She had no car and no food, so a trip to a local grocery was necessary to get her some supplies. She was supporting herself with two jobs—both a long distance from the apartment. She walked to these jobs, in all kinds of weather, one of which she reached across a bridge over the Mississippi River. She never asked for anything from me.

There was much about this segment of her life I knew nothing about and I was wise enough to ask few questions. This arrangement lasted for about one year and then the phone call came. She had decided to move home and choose another pathway in life.

So, off I went with one of her sisters and a diesel fueled U-Haul to bring her home on Halloween weekend. The rental people tell you that a U-Haul cannot go faster than 55 miles per hour. I can tell you that it can and it did.

I suppose I was, in a small way, like the father in our little story. There was no “I told you so,” just a welcome home, without the fatted calf.

She has become a mature young woman with a good grip on life and the ability to handle almost everything. Without a break in the action, when she returned home, she got a job and has not stopped working since. She now holds a very responsible position in a small company. I like to think that her sojourn taught her what was valuable in life and when she “came to her self” she knew what she wanted. Like the prodigal son.

Reconciliations in our lives come about in many different ways. Sometimes a child returns home and is gently and warmly welcomed back. Sometimes a friendship that has been bruised is restored and the event that happened to injure one or both of the friends is laid to rest. Sometimes a marriage bond that is close to being severed is sutured back together by a third party and, as things heal, the couple sees one another through new eyes and realizes that the love they have is no flash in the pan. Sometimes siblings, as they grow older, take a good look at one another and forgive all the little tortures of childhood they inflicted on one another. And, sometimes, we manage to set some time aside, take a good look at ourselves, decide the past is past and the present is all we have and we love ourselves for who we are and where we are in life. When we do these things we discover that we act from the center of “undying love” Nouwen wrote about.

We take the love God has for us and apply it to the places it is needed the most. It is a beautiful thing.

During these remaining weeks of Lent, we need to look around ourselves and within ourselves and discover where it is that we need to mend a few bridges. Then we need to act in the direction in which we need to go, setting aside our own ego needs and desires, and offering a healing hand, a loving embrace, a welcoming word that restores us into right relationship with those we hold most dear. Our religion is based on the value of relationships, ours with God and ours with our fellow humans. We are the only ones who can choose to act. We must choose wisely.

-- Amen