

Sermon Luke 15:11b-32  
'Coming Home'  
March 30<sup>th</sup>, 2025

Has anyone here ever heard of the Irish singer/songwriter Damien Rice? If you haven't, I don't blame you – he had one hit here in the U.S. in the early 2000s, 'Cannonball'; however, he's gathered something of a cult following since those days, and published numerous albums.

I find Damien Rice's music fascinating. One can definitely detect his Irish folk roots, but then he can also be quite eclectic. When I listen to one of his albums, I usually skip over some of the tracks – it's just too much for me. His lyrics are also interesting, to say the least – often talking honestly – and sometimes shockingly - about the highs and lows and bitter disappointment of relationships. So if you feel inspired to check out his music, and come across one of his edgier pieces: you've been warned! But then there are also those gems of pure poetry.

In 2014\*, Rice wrote a piece called, 'Trusty and True', which blew me away the first time I heard it. Because Rice manages to summarize the theological concepts of sin, repentance, and God's grace in a beautiful way. In addition, the melody is beautiful, taken right from traditional Irish folk music.

'We've wanted to be trusty and true  
But feathers fell from our wings  
We wanted to be worthy of you  
But weather rained on our dreams

And we can't take back what is gone, what is past  
So fellas, lay down your fears  
'Cause we can't take back what is gone, what is past  
So let us start from here.'

I'm just in love with this line, 'but feathers fell from our wings'. Anyway, Rice goes on how we've become beings we never intended to be. And then there is a bridge in this song, where Rice sings,

'And if all that you are is not all you desire – then come.'

And for the remainder of the song – almost 4 minutes (the whole track is just over 8 minutes long), the listener is beckoned to ‘come’. And the words Rice uses here could be a welcome statement for many a church.

‘Come, come alone  
Come with fears, come with love  
Come however you are  
Just come, come alone  
Come with friends, come with foes  
Come however you are  
Just come, come alone  
Come with me, then let go  
Come however you are  
Just come, come alone  
Come so carefully closed  
Come however you are  
Just come’

I don’t know about you, but I think this is brilliant. But it gets even better: in the background of those words, a chorus sings repeatedly:

‘Come, let yourself be wrong  
Come, it’s already begun’

Which of course leads to the question, what has already begun? Maybe what we like to call the kingdom of God? A realm where we are reconciled with God and neighbor, even though plenty of feathers fell from our wings? I’d like to interpret it that way.

But I am even more struck by those *other* words the chorus sings: Come, let yourself be wrong.

I assume we’ve all heard the story of the Prodigal Son before, maybe even as far back in Sunday school, where it’s one of the favorite stories to teach. Now we tend to focus on the first part of the story, where the younger son – the rebellious one – asks his father to give him his part of the inheritance – (which, back in the day, was a shocking request, since someone gave their inheritance away in death, and the younger son basically was saying to his father, ‘I wish you were dead’) and squanders the money carelessly. But as he falls on hard times and has time to reflect, he acknowledges: he is no angel. He is aware of what grave sin he’s committed by basically declaring

his father dead and cutting all ties to his family, his home, the place he belongs. Maybe he is too proud to come back home at first. But maybe he is just deeply ashamed. And so he hires himself out as a swineherd, just to get by – and, again, that must have been quite shocking for the audience in Jesus’ days, because pigs are considered ritually unclean by any Jewish believer. This young man couldn’t have sunk any lower.

But maybe you’ve heard the saying that one has to hit rock bottom before being able to turn their live around. As the younger son longs to eat the same slop the pigs feed on, he remembers – remembers his father, and how well he treats his servants. He remembers where he comes from – and where he still somehow belongs to – and decides to go back home, albeit to hire himself out to his father – for hasn’t he declared him dead the day he took the money and ran?

The wayward son lets himself be wrong. Under this premise, he returns home.

Now I don’t know if you caught it when I just read the story, but it seems that the father never gave up on his younger son. That he’s been on the lookout all the time the younger one was away – for how could the father see his son while he was still far off, and run to greet him, if he hadn’t been watching and waiting? And maybe the prayer of the father all this time has been: come! Come back home.

And what a homecoming it is! The father is overjoyed – and welcomes his son back home, as a full member of the family. This would not have happened if the son hadn’t let himself be wrong – if he hadn’t admitted to himself (and his father) that he messed up royally.

But the story doesn’t end here. There is the older brother – the one who stayed home and served his father faithfully - who is quite upset when he learns that his younger brother has returned – and what a big deal his father is making about it. It’s not fair! And can’t we relate to that feeling, somehow?

I’m pretty sure that, if the older brother had been the first one to see the younger one return, he gleefully might have sent him to work in the fields as a slave. Serves him right! He brought it on himself, after all.

But it's the father who sees the younger one first. And throws a party. And so the older son balks. I'm not going to that party! I'm mad at my brother, mad at my father.

We may not pick up on it today, but, according to Middle-Eastern culture, the older brother dishonors his father as well. He dishonors the father by staying away from the celebration – we have that theme in the gospels over and over, that God invites to that great feast of love and joy, and people just don't show up, for whatever reason, and what an insult it is to the host. Just last Sunday, we heard beautiful words from the Prophet Isaiah, in which God repeatedly beckons people to come and feast on what is good. Why does God even have to beckon? Those listening to Jesus' story back in the day would have noticed what a disrespectful jerk the older brother is, by not heeding the father's invitation. That he, in a sense, pulls out of the relationship – not only to his brother, but his father as well by being self-righteous. That in a sense he needs to find his way back home as well.

And the father is keeping this door wide open by going after his older son – and pleading with him, beckoning him, to rejoice with him. Come, I beg you! But it will require the older son to let himself be wrong, to admit his pride and self-righteousness, to heed the father's invitation to come.

Now Jesus doesn't tell us how the story ends – and probably deliberately so. Will the older one repent and join the party? Will the prodigal one live up to the grace he's received? Will the two brothers ever reconcile? Will they ever be able to share a home with the father again?

Now if you think about it, all those questions haven't been solved up to this day. After all, we are currently not at some heavenly banquet, joyfully celebrating the reconciliation of all humanity with our heavenly parent. On the contrary: how much infighting is there between folks, siblings, who call themselves followers of Christ alone, too proud and self-righteous to accept the 'other' as equals?

And think about how hard it is for people, and for ourselves, to let ourselves be wrong? To admit to ourselves and others that we made mistakes? We live in an age of excuses, smoke screens, self-justification, and blatant lies and/or scapegoating to cover up any mistakes. We live in an age where the admission of fault is seen as a weakness – just like other 'woke' concepts

like compassion and mercy. We are far, oh so far, from reconciliation. We are oh so far from the kingdom of God, where justice and peace reign.

And yet: God is waiting, waiting patiently for all of us to come around, and come home. God is on the lookout, watching and waiting. God goes after us, pleading. Because God could never stop loving us. And God is willing to make a fresh start, to make all things new.

‘Cause we can’t take back what is gone, what is past  
So let us start from here.’  
‘Let yourself be wrong’  
‘And if all that you are is not all you desire, then come’

That’s easier said than done. But if not now, during the season of Lent, this season of introspection, repentance, and the opening up to God’s amazing grace which we see demonstrated in Jesus Christ on the cross – if not now, then when?

Amen

You can listen to ‘Trusty and True’ at this link:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TnPeG7-gdkQ&list=OLAK5uy\\_lhBKVDKp1gE00QOIjyjcNfEK6gC8IBUkU&index=7](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TnPeG7-gdkQ&list=OLAK5uy_lhBKVDKp1gE00QOIjyjcNfEK6gC8IBUkU&index=7)

\*© 2014 Damien Rice and Vector Recordings