

## “Come Home”

Date: Nov. 16, 2014

Place: Lakewood UMC

Text: Matthew 25:14-30

Occasion: Pentecost 23, Yr. B

Theme: Grace

“America’s Got Talent” is one of several shows that came after the original talent show, “American Idol.” And we copied it from Great Britain’s “Pop Idol” success. Among the copycats are such shows as “Dancing with the Stars,” “The Voice,” “The X-Factor,” and “America’s Got Talent.”

Such TV shows are focused on finding that rare pearl of stardom that’s been hiding out among the grit and gravel of everyday gifts. Discovering someone’s ability to excel at something has its roots in today’s gospel text. In fact, you might call this gospel lesson the original “talent contest.”

Except back then they used the word differently than we do. In the first century a “talent” was actually a measure of weight – for gold, silver and copper. We don’t know its exact worth; we don’t even know what the weight was that a “talent” measured.

What we do know is this – a talent was the largest weight used in normal, everyday business. One “talent” was a considerable amount, especially if it was weighing such valuable commodities as gold, silver and copper.

In this week’s gospel parable, these weighty talents are given out by a certain master to his servants. One received 10 talents, one five and another was given one talent. The master obviously invested in each of these three servants according to his perception of their individual abilities.

It is because of this parable that the monetary weight of a “talent” became a term used to describe the natural ability of someone to do something. But the talent this master was testing was not a talent for making money, though it might appear to be the case.

No. This master was testing his servants for trustworthiness and faithfulness, for doing all one could on behalf of the master while his back was turned and he was away. Each of these servants was being tested for the integrity of their initiative, and how hard they would work on behalf of their master.

The master is gone a long time. The servants *should* be glad when the master returns. A household that has been separated is now reunited. Two of the servants show how glad they are that the master is returning. They couldn’t wait to show him what they had done while he had been away.

The actions of the third servant, the one entrusted with one talent, reveal a different story. Burying treasure in a secret hideaway was an accepted practice to safe-guard riches during times of trouble. It was a kind of first-century safe-deposit box.

But you only used this practice when trouble loomed. The act of burying the one talent by this servant revealed that he did not look forward to, nor did he even expect his master’s return. This third servant was simply hiding out until the master came home.

Finally the master did return, after a long time. A lot of time had passed, time for failure and for success. A lot of time for worry and for winning. A lot of time for anxiousness and also for anticipation. Two of the members of the household were joyful when the master

returned. For them, homecoming was a joyful time of singing, dancing and feasting.

The third servant, who did nothing with his talent except bury it, well, that's another story. He was not looking forward to a homecoming. He had only been expecting to hide out and brace himself for the high standards of a demanding master. He lived his life in fear. The 3<sup>rd</sup> servant hoped in his heart that the master would never return.

Those are still two big choices in life. Hiding out might seem like a good choice in the short run. Many people live their lives in fear, afraid to try, afraid to fail, afraid to be a disappointment – to themselves or to their parents, or to God.

But when you make that choice, you reject the opportunity of a “homecoming,” for the joy of entering into the pleasure of the Master. And you and I were made with a homing instinct that yearns for a homecoming.

To be sure, we have become an incredibly mobile people. How many of you now live in the home town you grew up in? How many of you root for a football team that is not local, but is the team you rooted for where you grew up?

We are a mobile society, but we still have a yearning to go home. Thanksgiving holiday is less than two weeks away. Many people will be traveling home for the holiday. Birds are nature's first frequent fliers, traveling thousands of miles just to get home.

Bees make a beeline back to the hive. Sea turtles will migrate to the same beaches they were born on, after roaming the oceans for 20 years or more. Every living creature longs for home. We are not

alone in our longings for home. We are not alone in our homesickness.

The Parable of the Prodigal Son is usually told as a story of forgiveness and acceptance. But the first step in that journey homeward is made the by the son who realizes he has made his life a mess and he needs to restore some basic relationships.

The prodigal son needed more than bed and bread; he needed more than bread and breakfast. He needed to come home to the father. This world *needs* more than it wants. It *needs* to COME HOME. Come home to the Father.

We all need to come home. In fact, this is the gospel in two words: COME HOME. Come home to the Father, a Father who is more than waiting for you with love and forgiveness. This Father, this God of ours, is running toward you, to hug you and to greet you and to welcome you home.

There are many kinds of homesickness, but the most universal one, the one underlying all other kinds of homesickness, is our homesickness for God. Augustine is famous for his “restless heart” passage found in his book “Confessions:”

“You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it finds its rest in you. But what if we substituted the words *homeless* and *homesick* for restless? It would sound like this –

“Our home is with you, o God, and our heart is homeless and homesick until it finds its home in you.”

You and I were made for God. Nothing else will satisfy. Nothing else will bring joy. Our heart will only find its home with its Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer.

But what if your image of God is not that of a loving Father, but rather that of a judgmental, harsh God, who is just waiting for you to mess up? Who wants to come home to a God like that? Pastor James S. Hewett tells this story.

One day his son was using one of those super-adhesive glues on a model airplane he was building. “In less than three minutes,” the pastor says, “his right index finger was bonded to a shiny blue wing of a model airplane. He tried to free it. He tugged it, pulled it, waved it frantically, but he couldn’t budge his finger free.”

Dad quickly found a solvent that did the job and soon the boy’s finger was free again. But that image stuck in Pastor Hewett’s mind. The following night he was visiting a new family in their neighborhood. The father of that family introduced his children:

“This is Pete; he’s the clumsy one of the lot. That’s Kathy, coming in with mud on her shoes. She’s the sloppy one. And as always, Mike is last. He’ll be late for his own funeral.”

James Hewett goes on to say, “That father did a thorough job of gluing his children to their faults and mistakes. People do it to us all the time. They remind us of our failures, our errors, our sins, and they won’t let us forget them.”

For many people they view God that way. God is always reminding them of their past, of their failures of their mistakes, of their sin. God is an Almighty Judge who just makes them feel guilty and terrible. But Jesus invites us to experience God in a new way.

Jesus paid the price for the forgiveness of our sins, by dying on the cross. His blood is the solvent that separates us from our faults and failures. Jesus sets us free, ungluing the sin from our soul. God

is our Heavenly Father who says, “Come home. All is forgiven. I love you. I won’t remind you of the past. I won’t glue your failures to your soul. Christ has set you free. Come home. Come home.”

My friends, I don’t know what’s in your past, or what it is that separates you from God. Maybe it’s a fight you had with someone that you’ve never forgiven, or maybe you never asked him or her to forgive you. Maybe it was an abortion that haunts you. Maybe it’s some sin that keeps coming up in your life that you can’t shake off. Jesus wants to set you free.

Do you need to come home to the Father this morning? To “Come home” means more than bed and bread. To come home means to be in relationship with the One who made you the way you are, and to use your talents, whatever they are, for the glory of God’s kingdom.

We are made with a homing instinct, a deep desire to return to the joy of the One who made us. Let us stand and sing hymn # 348, “Softly and Tenderly, Jesus is Calling.” Open your heart and receive God’s invitation to “Come Home.” Amen.

Adapted and used with permission: “Come Home.” Leonard Sweet Sermons, Leonard Sweet, ChristianGlobe Networks, Inc. 2014, 0-0000-1415.