

“One by One”

Sermon by Dan Harrison, Pastor, Church of the Covenant, Lynchburg, VA, 1/24/2021

Luke 15:11-32

*“One by one, we come home
All I know, heart and soul
Just let go, of what you hold
One by one, we come home” –Sam Garrett*

If many of us could sum up our personal mission in life, our personal hope, if you will... it often boils down to a very simple concept. While we use elaborate words like “community” and “social network,” or even “support systems,” the reality of our growing need for something outside of our individual selves can be ascertained in a very quick and common phrase: “I feel at home.”

Is there any more powerful a combination of words strung together: There is something so impacting when those words reach your ears, isn't there? When someone lets that phrase pass through their lips as they stare into your eyes, I can't think of anything so emotional apart from the words, “I love you.” When someone says “I feel at home,” doesn't it ignite feelings of absolute care and duty in your core? Don't you now almost feel somehow protective of this statement itself? It is sacred. Someone has indicated to you that in some way or another, they indeed feel closer to you and yours than they do to most ALL others in the world. They “feel at home” with you. This idea of community on this intimate level is at the core of what many of us crave, to feel “at home” with one another. So when our musician friend Sam Garrett shares this vision he has of “one by one, we come home” (a running theme in many of Sam's deepest song soliloquies), we instantly gravitate to the concept because we ourselves long for this feeling with others. In this metaphorical envisioning, Sam describes the feeling he has when we as human beings re-enter God's domain—one by one. And he points out the requirements to do so... It requires two things—a delivering of “heart and soul” and ultimately of “letting go of what we hold.”

This can be so easily illustrated in Jesus' parable of the “prodigal son return.” In the story (Luke 15:11-32) Jesus describes the son who leaves his home to squander his inheritance on foolishness. And once he's run out of money, he lives in squalor in a foreign land, destitute and starving. He has nothing. The animals are eating better than he is. So, after much time has passed and it says he “came to his senses,” he decides to return “home” but not as a family member. He feels so bad about all that he did, that he just wants his father to make him his servant—but instead his dad loves him so much that he forgives him immediately and restores him to his household as his son. He rejoices over him, his “lost son was found and returned home.” But what did it take? It took everything to make that sorrowful journey back. Step by step. One by one.

And in the same way no matter where we are right now in life, whether we're off in a strange place squandering our resources on selfish foolishness, or in the thick of the mud-of-life... starving, or sitting in the warmth of personal tranquility and peace, we all long to “be home” with God and to “be home” with one another. And “one by one,” step by step, we will be. But it takes everything.

To be at home with our Creator is to be at home with one another. Jesus summed this up in John 15: “you abide in me as I abide in the Father” and “Love one another as I have loved you.” These relationships are interlinked. So, we must offer “heart and soul.” It cannot be half-done. We must “all in.” Are you all in? Are you willing to give it everything you’ve got? Because that is what it requires. But it will undoubtedly require a personal relinquishment of things in our lives that are holding us back... and only we can identify what those things are in our life, for each of us is unique in what unhealthy anchors we’ve developed over the course of a lifetime: fear, pride, envy, selfishness, apathy, and personal pain. Let it go. And together finally let’s “be at home.” One by one. Hand in hand.

Shalom