

March 31, 2019

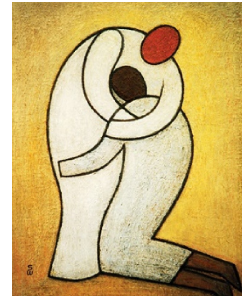
**Fourth Sunday of Lent**

Jos. 5:9A, 10-12, 2 Cor. 5:17-21, Lk. 15:1-3, 11-32

Marge Cavanaugh

*Visitation Marianist State Community*

Who do you identify with in the familiar story of the prodigal son? There are many highly textured characters to choose from: the adventurous, irresponsible son; the older, stay at home, responsible brother; the successful, secure, generous father; the observant servants; and the tax collectors to whom the story was directed. Upon this reading, I noticed the father and especially how emotional this event was for him.



I'm sure I was influenced in this choice by a friend telling me about her cat. (patience, please!) The cat is an outdoor cat, part of the time. In recent cold and rainy weather, the cat was gone for 3 days, during which time the owner was very concerned and distraught about the kitty's fate. At last, the cat returned none the worse for wear and the owner felt great relief and happiness. If that is how my friend felt about the return of her cat, how much joy must the father in this story have felt upon the return of his son? But also, how much anxiety and stress must the father have experienced during the time his son was gone? He describes his son as "lost" (like the cat, apologies) and given the state of communication at that time, he may not have heard anything about him for years.

The theme of "lost" and "found" runs through this section of Luke's Gospel. Here also are the stories of the lost sheep and the widow's mite. In all three, there is great joy upon finding what was lost. In all three stories, there is a sense that the seeker (the father, the shepherd, the widow) had some responsibility for that which was lost and needed to effect a return to the normal state of things.

Luke himself provides the moral to the stories, "The Son of Man has come to seek out and save what was lost." (Lk 19:10) The story about the prodigal son surely has overtones of forgiveness and reconciliation. But the other stories don't. Was there responsibility or repentance by the sheep, the mite (or the cat)? But there was recovery of a right order of things, a realignment of relationships, perhaps with some imagination, even on the scale of the universe, and initiative taken by those with responsibility.

For those of us in communities open to forgiveness and change, there is surely joy when someone joins the community or returns to it after some absence. But these stories suggest that we also celebrate those times when some right order is gained, even in small ways, for the poor, for minorities, for the environment, for a neighborhood. For God entrusted us with the message of reconciliation, in the broadest possible sense.