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Title: Come Home

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Text: [Luke 15:11-32](#)

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I just got back from keynoting a high school church camp in North Carolina where I was blessed to share a message of embodiment and faith while sharing a bit of my story. Many of you may not know how I got to be who I am, and if you don't mind, I will share a bit of my story with you.

I was born and raised in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). I come from a long line of faithful church-goers. Both sets of grandparents were lifelong Disciples and taught Sunday School classes. My maternal granddad started the Shalom Symposia program at Central Christian Church in Lexington, KY, and was active in peace and justice issues. My parents met in the singles group. My mom is active in Disciples Women, Outreach, earth stewardship, Best Friends Dementia Care, ESL, Mission Beyond Bars, Bible and Book study, and more. My sister is a pastor and creation care minister. Her entire family is active in church. And my dad teaches Sunday School, is an Elder, chaplain, and sometimes preacher, officiating at not his first funeral on Monday. He also practices the religion of University of Kentucky basketball. ;) He taught me well in matters of cheering for both the Cats on the court *and* to stand up and make a loud noise when I see injustice. When I was dedicated in the church, my dad raised me high above his head, and that's how it has been almost ever since.

I was involved in children's choir and youth groups, led worship, and served as a youth deacon growing up. Everyone in my high school knew that church was important to me, and I invited friends to youth group.

This commitment to church continued until I graduated high school. I began modeling when I was 14, and although I won a \$75,000 modeling contract when I was 15 if I quit school, I turned it down to finish high school like a normal teenager. My summer job was not so "normal,"

however, as I traveled to Tokyo and Europe over school breaks. No matter where I went, my parents (or at least one of them) visited me and supported my decisions, which also includes allowing me to make my own mistakes.

My parents were not so excited when I told them, shortly after I turned 19, that I would be driving my (formerly my granddad's) 1985 Toyota Tercel hatchback across the country because I was moving to Los Angeles. I didn't ask permission; I gave my parents a lot of grief. My dad threw hangers all over the street as we packed the car. But he didn't prevent me from going.

In LA and while I traveled the world, I never had a church home. I found somewhere to go on Easter, of course, and I made it back home for Christmas, but in the meantime, I was uninvolved in church, unfortunately.

The modeling industry sounds so glamorous and exotic, and some of it is, but I can tell you that it can also be superficial and harmful. I hurt my body and spirit trying to be thinner and living a "Hollywood" lifestyle for a bit. In the depths of depression, I couldn't pick myself up off the floor, and I called my sister. She said, "Come home."

Well, I hadn't thought of that before. She was the voice of God. So, I packed just one suitcase because I was going home for just a month to get happy and then return. However, once I moved back in with my parents, I got a job, went to church, and found joy. I realized I didn't need to go back to LA. So, I stayed home and enrolled at the University of Kentucky to begin my college career.

At church, I was asked to be a youth group sponsor, and I loved the responsibility. I worked with the youth every Sunday and on weekend events. I went to church camp for the first time, as a counselor. I couldn't have been happier.

But then, I met a boy. He wanted to be an actor, and guess where he wanted to move? LA. So, I got married at church and moved back to Cali. Unfortunately, my marriage struggled, and again, I had no church home. I worked 16 hours a day in television before taking a job as a legal secretary. It only took a couple of years to realize that the marriage would not last. I was empty and sad.

I decided to apply to UCLA so I could complete my undergrad degree. (My dad *did* have something to say about that since UCLA has more

national championships than our beloved UK Wildcats. Blue blood runs thick.)

I loved my job, but I felt God's calling for my life was something different. On my first anniversary at the law office, I received notice that I had not been accepted. UCLA rejected me, and I was crushed! On my teary walk home, I called my sister. She said, "Come home."

There was nothing left in LA keeping me there, and again, the voice of God called me back home.

So, once I again I moved in with my parents. This time, I was older and divorced and dejected. The first Sunday after I arrived home, my dad said, "You're going to church, aren't you?" I didn't feel like it. I was depressed and embarrassed. But he said, "Come on." So, I went.

I sat with my parents on the left side near the front of the sanctuary like I always had growing up. And I cried. I was so ashamed that I had made vows in front of God and my church family and I had broken those vows. Everyone had been so excited, and now I was home feeling like a damaged woman.

I cried every Sunday for about a month or so, but I kept going. Something in my heart said, "Come home." I felt a pull to be in the company of family and in the presence of God. God does not only exist within the walls of the worship space, but there, I could feel the power of forgiveness and unconditional love. I was without hesitancy invited back into the youth group as adult sponsor, and I relished my relationship with the young people. I was more involved in church than I had been in many years. For the first time, I traveled to engage in mission, not modeling. I used my body to build houses, not to sell artificial beauty. And God came calling again, to enter the vocation of ministry – along with marriage and motherhood.

Until then, I couldn't imagine that someone who had lived a "Hollywood lifestyle" could preach in the pulpit, or on stage, as it is. But I learned that no matter what, God calls all of us into ministry. Here, we practice the priesthood of believers, *all* believers. Sometimes those with the shadiest or most difficult pasts can practice the most empathy. God loves and embraces those who stray and those who stay. And the kin-dom of God is not whole until all are present.

The scripture we heard follows two other passages about the lost and found. You know the story of the 100 sheep: one is lost and the shepherd

is not satisfied until it is found. In the next, a woman loses one of her ten coins and throws a party when she finds it. The so-called prodigal son story *seems* to follow that same pattern, but the original hearers would have been expecting a twist.

We get that. In the story of the three little pigs, the wolf can blow down the house of the first two, but not the third. In Goldilocks, the third bowl of porridge and bed were "just right." That third thing is a little different than the first two.

So, what would this third story about lost and found mean? Was it just one son who was lost? What about the brother, who was mad because *he* hadn't squandered his college tuition living a "Hollywood" lifestyle, making poor choices, and finally wandering back to his dad because he had no place to go?

The story we read today is not about one child who strayed and one who stayed. The Father rejoices *only* when one has come home in person *and* one has come home in his heart. The twist is that the kin-dom is not complete, the family is not whole and happy, until *all* are found. The lost in body and the lost in spirit.

My story doesn't align with the Bible completely, as my big sister was always supportive of me, never jealous, and is the voice of God who called me home. My dad, *and* mom *and* sister and niece and nephews and church family were present to rejoice that I had come home.

Not all who wander are lost and not all who are lost, wander. I wonder who are the lost in our midst? They may look just like you and me. They might not. On this weekend, when we celebrate Father's Day, some may be like me and glad to be in the company of their dads, but others might not.

Some fathers may be the ones lost. Children may not be able to participate in rejoicing because of abuse, addiction, abandonment, imprisonment, unavailability. Some grieve the loss of fathers due to illness and death. Knowing that they are "at home" with God does not stop the tears of grief. And that's ok. God laughs with those who laugh and weeps with those who weep.

Some who are lost may be active in church and still feel far from "home." *They* might be *you*. And that's ok, too. The path back to God is not a maze, "an agent of deception with dead-ends that lead nowhere." The path to God is more like a labyrinth, twists and turns, to be followed on

one's own "sacred journey inward," as all paths lead to the center, and "then back out to greater wholeness."

We each have our own journeys of faith. Sometimes we can't see a clear path, it takes quite a while and many tries. But of course, the voice of God keeps calling, the loving parent continues to stand at the end of bottom of the elevator in the airport baggage claim area, with arms wide open. The loving parent sits in the seat next to you, offering a shoulder on which to cry. And that parent raises his child above his head in dedication.

One of my worst nightmares is that our daughter will follow my long and winding journey, but I trust that wherever and however she may wander, God will go with her, shine a light upon her path, and guide her back "Home."

I pray, too, that our eyes and hearts will be open to see what God is doing here at Geist Christian Church, and our ears and spirits will be open to listen to God's call for this congregation. I hope you find "Home" here and will invite others to join the celebration with open doors, minds, and Table. All are welcome, and the family isn't complete till all have arrived.

"Come Home!"