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Lent 4, Year C  
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I love routine. My circadian rhythm is hardwired. Fifteen year old Troy went to bed at 8:30 and got up at 4:30 so I could catch the news, go for a run, before waking my mom up for work. 8:30-4:30 is still about right.

It is probably no surprise to learn that when this routine is disrupted, it's hard for me to accept. Even for things I like. Back in seminary a group of us were gathering for compline or night prayer one night, we were going to do it at 9 or 9:30. I do love Compline, so after some nudging I went. (I was tired and I wasn't planning on going earlier that day.) It wasn't on my schedule. I went, begrudgingly. After, Ole asked me if I was glad I went, a little owly, with my hands in my pockets, I said no.

I can get so tied to my own ideas of how things are supposed to go that when things change or get interrupted I can stew, attempting to justify myself and my ways, and feeling a bit resentful, indigent, judgy, and irritated. I'm not proud of it.

It's hard to let go. Step aside. Open your hands. Take our hands out of our pockets. Rearrange your routine. Hold your expectations loosely. Painful even. It's a kind of death.

We know this parable. Two sons, a father. Who are we? We are tired. overwhelmed. Most of us are strivers. Accomplishers. Despite that, if we are alone with our thoughts we might confess that we still worry about things like being accepted, loved, valued, seen for who we are. Afraid of rejection. Terrified of failure or even of God.

Maybe we are the younger son. Keenly aware of our sin. We know the far country. Dissolute living, longing to eat with the pigs. The places we have gone and the things we have done are written on our face. It's like everyone stares at us like an exhibit in a museum, if we are here at all. This might not be the kind of place those people hang out. Being a church and all. But, you might be here- so stay. We need you. If you can hear my voice- keep listening.

You could be the older son. You've done everything right. You followed every plan set out for you. Rules are your friend. Religious or otherwise. Your bases are covered. And when you do the right stuff and things don't turn out- or when rebels get rewarded it stings. I know that sting too well. Routines and rules go hand in hand. When those who break the rules get parties thrown for them it's like the universe is off its axis and we'd rather not go in. You know resentment, irritation, and indignation. You are probably not proud of it.

However you find yourself, wherever you've been- the good news is for you.

For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

There is a reason the father seems oblivious to the confession of the younger son. We are forgiven before we repent- because Jesus already took care of it. You are forgiven. Remember, It is finished. We are saved by someone else entirely. God has done everything. As Robert Capon points out, the younger son knew he was dead, at the end of himself. God does God's best work with death and dead ends. The risen life belongs to him with no strings attached. An embrace, ring, robe, kiss, sandals, party, a future-- because God is the prodigal. Reckless, spendthrift, imprudent, and lavish with all that God could ever give including resurrection life to all as good as dead.

Listen: You have been found. Welcomed. You are home. You are loved. You are saved. You are forgiven. You belong here. You were dead and are alive. It's all a gift.

How about the rest of us? We just have to die. Remember what God loves to work with? Let go of those things we hold so tightly to and fall into grace. The hardest thing for stand up people to do. Resurrection life is ours as well. You too- were saved by grace. 100%. Forgiven and claimed from the start. before a thousand failures and a million successes. The same prodigal God calls you beloved. You've always been invited to the party. Come on in. Give in to the relentless backbeat of grace. In baptism you already died the only death that had any power, so get on with it. Dying to judging, pretending, grumbling, resentment, score-keeping, standing outside with our hands in our pockets, all creates room for God to do God's resurrecting work. And for joy.

New creation is like a dance floor. The rhythms of our God are cruciform. Thank God, even if it messes up our routines. In the end there is a feast. A party. The fatted calf. Plenty for everyone.

Uptown funk, Sweet Caroline, Cha Cha Slide. At a wedding or another party. Probably past my bedtime. A song came on and you couldn't help but be drawn onto the dance floor, at least tap your foot. All you could do was give in to the music and let it move you. You might call it a kind of blessed self forgetfulness. Grace. If we listen we can hear our prodigal DJ spinning the soundtrack of death and resurrection. Give it enough time even the most rigid of us will close our eyes and sway.

It will keep playing until everyone is there, no one is outside, and all are home. The least we can do is take our hands out of our pockets.

