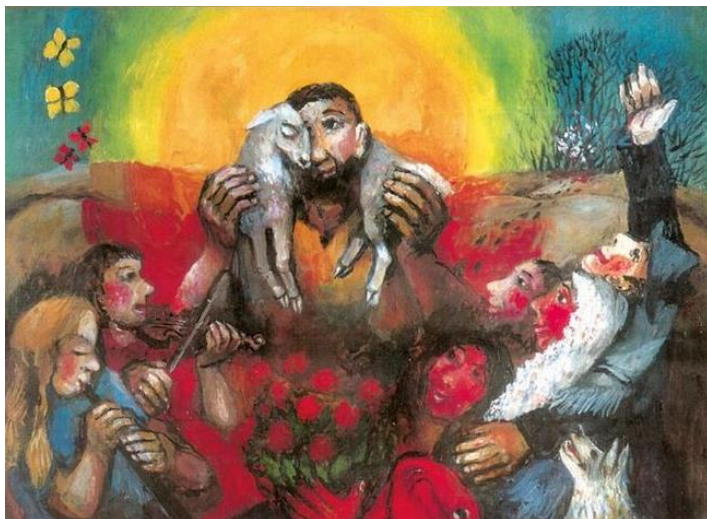


The Expectant
Father Parable
Luke 15

Quotes from
Henri Nouwen

Pictures by
 Rembrandt,
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The Father

How does the image of the *expectant Father* help you in your faith? Us as a church?

The expectant Father is watching for those who return...

The running Father goes running out to welcome....

The forgiving Father embraces the 'lost' ...

The joyous Father celebrates...

In the past I always thought of gratitude as a spontaneous response to the awareness of gifts received, but now I realize that gratitude can also be lived as a discipline. The discipline of gratitude is the explicit effort to acknowledge that all I am and have is given to me as a gift of love, a gift to be celebrated with joy.

Home is the centre of my being, where I can hear the voice that says, "You are my beloved. On you my favour rests," the same voice that gave life to the first Adam and spoke to Jesus, the second Adam. The same voice that speaks to all the children of God and sets them free to live in the midst of a dark world while remaining in the light. I have heard that voice. It has spoken to me in the past and continues to speak to me now. It is the never-interrupted voice of love speaking from eternity and giving life and love wherever it is heard.

I now see that the hands that forgive, console, heal, and offer a festive meal must become my own.

Celebration belongs to God's Kingdom. God not only offers forgiveness, reconciliation, and healing, but wants to lift up these gifts as a source of joy for all who witness them.

In the parables Jesus tells to explain why he eats with sinners, God rejoices and invites others to rejoice with him. "Rejoice with me," the shepherd says, "I have found my sheep that was lost." "Rejoice with me," the woman says, "I have found the drachma I lost." "Rejoice with me," the father says, "this son of mine was lost and is found."

All these voices are the voices of God. God does not want to keep his joy to himself. He wants everyone to share in it. God's joy is the joy of his angels and his saints; it is the joy of all who belong to the Kingdom.

*Love bade me welcome. Yet my soul drew back guilty of dust and sin.
But quick-eyed Love, observing me grow slack from my first entrance in,
Drew nearer to me, sweetly questioning, If I lacked any thing.*

*A guest, I answered, worthy to be here: Love said, You shall be he.
I the unkind, ungrateful? Ah my dear I cannot look on thee.
Love took my hand, and smiling did reply, Who made the eyes but I?*

*Truth Lord, but I have marred them: let my shame go where it doth
deserve.*

*And know you not, says Love, who bore the blame?
My dear, then I will serve.*

*You must sit down, says Love, and taste my meat: So, I did sit and eat.
George Herbert*

How do these images of God help us or challenge us in how we approach worship?



The Younger Son

Admits failure and addiction, admits he is lost and tries to find a way back

For most of my life I have struggled to find God, to know God, to love God. I have tried hard to follow the guidelines of the spiritual life—pray always, work for others, read the Scriptures—and to avoid the many temptations to dissipate myself. I have failed many times but always tried again, even when I was close to despair.

I am the prodigal son every time I search for unconditional love where it cannot be found...

"Addiction" might be the best word to explain the lostness that so deeply permeates society. Our addiction makes us cling to what the

world proclaims as the keys to self-fulfilment: accumulation of wealth and power; attainment of status and admiration; lavish consumption of food and drink, and sexual gratification without distinguishing between lust and love. These addictions create expectations that cannot but fail to satisfy our deepest needs. As long as we live within the world's delusions, our addictions condemn us to futile quests in "the distant country," leaving us to face an endless series of disillusionments while our sense of self remains unfulfilled. In these days of increasing addictions, we have wandered far away from our Father's home. The addicted life can aptly be designated a life lived in "a distant country." It is from there that our cry for deliverance rises up.

The Older Son

Complains and Compares

Resentment and gratitude cannot coexist, since resentment blocks the perception and experience of life as a gift. My resentment tells me that I don't receive what I deserve. It always manifests itself in envy.

My resentment is not something that can be easily distinguished and dealt with rationally. It is far more pernicious: something that has attached itself to the underside of my virtue. Isn't it good to be obedient, dutiful, law-abiding, hardworking, and self-sacrificing? And still it seems that my resentments and complaints are mysteriously tied to such praiseworthy attitudes. This connection often makes me despair. At the very moment I want to speak or act out of my most generous self, I get caught in anger or resentment. And it seems that just as I want to be most selfless, I find myself obsessed about being loved. Just when I do my utmost to accomplish a task well, I find myself questioning why others do not give themselves as I do. Just when I think I am capable of overcoming my temptations, I feel envy toward those who gave in to theirs. It seems that wherever my virtuous self is, there also is the resentful complainer.

The elder brother compares himself with the younger one and becomes jealous. But the father loves them both so much that it didn't even occur to him to delay the party in order to prevent the elder son from feeling rejected. I am convinced that many of my emotional problems would melt as snow in the sun if I could let the truth of God's motherly non-comparing love permeate my heart.

