

**SI:** We’re going to spend the next four Sundays looking at Christ’s Advent through the lens of home. Home is a big part of Christmas celebration. I’ve titled this series: “I’ll Be Home For Christmas”

The song *I’ll Be Home For Christmas* was written by a man named Kim Gannon. It’s from the perspective of a soldier stationed overseas writing to family. He tells them he’s coming home and to prepare for him. He requests to please have snow and mistletoe and presents on the tree. But you know the last line. It ends on a wistful note with the soldier admitting he’s not really coming home: I’ll be home for Christmas if only in my dreams.

All the music companies turned Kim Gannon down when he tried to sell it. This was the middle of WWII and they said it was way too sad for all the people separated from their loved ones in the military. Fortunately Kim Gannon knew Bing Crosby. While playing golf he sang it to him. Bing loved, recorded it and released it December 1943 and it became a huge hit. Americans at home loved it. American servicemen overseas loved it. But in the United Kingdom the BBC banned the song from being broadcast because they thought the lyrics would lower morale.

I think those different responses to the song illustrates something about home. Home is something that people long for and yet it can be difficult and sad. The holidays themselves can draw that into sharper focus. There are people who want to be home for Christmas, but they aren’t. They can’t be. Only in my dreams. There are people you wish were home but they’re gone. Or maybe you are home for Christmas, but there are problems at home, home is not what you want it to be.

So the big idea that we’re going to focus on in all four of these Advent sermons is that Jesus came and made his home with us and in us as his people. And he’s coming again to take us home— so all our longings for home are found in knowing him and being with him.

**INTRO:** Jesus was criticized by the Pharisees for eating with sinners. He responded by telling three parables about lost things.

First parable is about a lost sheep.

Second parable about a lost coin.

Third parable, usually called Parable of Prodigal Son, is really about two sons who were each lost in different ways.

In each parable someone looks for and finds what was lost and brings it home to its rightful place. The shepherd leaves 99 sheep to find the one lost.

The woman sweeps her house until she finds the coin.

And the father in this parable seeks to restore each of his sons.

So all the parables are about Jesus seeking and finding lost people and bringing them home.

So let's consider three things this last parable teaches us about being home.

I'll give them to you as we go.

## **MP#1 Home is a longing—it's something we long for**

We see this in the experience of the younger son.

The younger son didn't like his life at home, he didn't want to be there.

So he left and went to a far country and lived it up, lost everything,

hit a real low point—so hungry he wanted to eat pig food.

So he decided to go back home where he knows that even if he is a servant

he will have food to eat and a safe place to lay his head.

So let's think about the two longings that the younger son had.

### **First, he had a longing for something more in his life.**

That's why he left.

He told his father to give him his share of the inheritance early and he set out on a journey of self-discovery.

He wanted to get out of what he felt to be the confines of his family

and see the world and meet new people and have new experiences.

It's like some college students.

They don't go to college to pursue a career or vocation.

They don't go out of love of learning. They go to get away from home.

They go to shake of the confines of home and small town maybe church.

To sow their wild oats. Find themselves.

I imagine most of us have had that feeling at one time or another—

a desire for something more.

A feeling that our lives and the path we've taken is confining and small.

We want to be a part of something bigger and more exciting.

Now obviously the way many people try to fulfill that longing is wrong.

But I don't think the longing itself is wrong.

The human heart was created to worship God.

We have an innate longing to be connected to something bigger than ourselves, to be a part of something important and exciting and fulfilling—

How did St. Augustine put it?

You have made us for yourself, our hearts are restless till they rest in you.

The problem is this longing gets turned to other things besides God

and eventually the wheels come off. That's what happened to the younger son.

When he hit his lowest point, he had another longing.

### **He longed for security and provision**

It says in verse 17 that he came to himself. What am I doing? I'm miserable.

He felt the weight of loneliness and frustration and he wanted to go home. All of a sudden those things that felt so confining to him that he couldn't stand—the security and provision of home—they sounded pretty good.

One time when Eliza was little she got hurt on some playground equipment here at the church. She was moaning and in a lot of pain.

We thought something was broken so we took her to urgent care.

She didn't have broken bones, but because of pain were going to give her a shot. What do little children say when they are in that situation? Facing shots.

What do they say: I want to go home. I want to go home.

Because home means security and provision.

Things that are wrong are set right when you're home.

If hurting, you don't need a shot in a scary doctor's office, just need to get home.

In way these two longings are contradictory.

Do you want something big and exiting and unpredictable and different—  
or do you want order and predictability and security and provision?

At times we long for both.

And just like people can get in trouble with that first longing for something more,  
they can also get in trouble with the second one too.

Trying to find that thing that is going to guarantee your security and provision—  
whether it is money or your career or relationships, family, marriage.

Those are all good things but they can't bear that weight.

Where do you get both of those things?

Where do you have your deep longings fulfilled—for importance and meaning—  
and at the same time security and provision?

From God our Father—through Jesus Christ.

Knowing him, being God's child, being part of his family by faith.

You get to be a part of something big and important—  
the kingdom of Jesus that is conquering the world.

Holy Spirit in you who calls you at times to do exciting and daring things.

And at the same time a Father who says he knows what you need.

Savior who says—Never will I leave you, never will I forsake you.

I am with you always, to the very end of the age.

Home is a longing. That longing is fulfilled by God in Christ.

## **MP#2 Home is a mercy**

When the younger son came to his senses and decided to return home,

he was sure that he had to approach his father in a certain way.  
He had it all worked out. He would say, I'm not worthy to be called your son.  
Take me on as one of your hired men.

He thought home was a place that had to be earned.

That his acceptance in home was based on merit.  
Maybe that's one reason why he left. Maybe he felt like he wasn't good enough.  
Like he didn't compare to his older brother who did everything right.

He fully expected his father meet him with a frown and say:

So you're back. Here are the terms for you to stay.

You've got to work off the money you've wasted.

If you pull more stunts then you're out of here.

The son was expecting that. He was expecting home based on merit.

But you know what happened.

It's one of the most moving scenes in all of Jesus' parables.

While he was still a long way off, his father saw him.

Which must mean his father was watching and hoping every day.

Then his father's heart was filled with compassion and he ran to him and  
embraced him (fell on his neck, KJV), and kissed him.

That wasn't all. He put a new robe on him, ring on finger, sandals on feet,  
killed the fattened calf and called the whole household to celebrate.

It turned out that home wasn't a place that had to be earned.

But his father's response showed that home is not based on merit—  
home is a place of mercy, it's a place of acceptance.

It's fascinating is how this revelation of mercy affected the older son.

He was out in the field, working, doing what he was supposed to be doing.

He heard the sound of celebration, found out what was going on, became enraged.  
Why did he get so mad?

Because he too thought, just like younger brother, that home was based on merit.  
But unlike his younger brother who had failed to earn a place, blown it—  
the older brother felt like he had earned his rightful place.

That's what he told his father.

All these years I've been serving you, never disobeying you.

I haven't gotten a goat to celebrate with my friends (Adrienne, corn chips, water).

This son of yours who has squandered his inheritance on prostitutes comes home  
and you kill the fattened calf for him.

His father's merciful response shattered the older son's view of home too—  
but it upset him.

Now it seems clear that when Jesus told this parable, he was hoping his critics  
would see themselves in the older son.

Remember the Pharisees and teachers of the law muttered to themselves that  
Jesus was eating with tax collectors and sinner.

These were people who had transgressed God's law in very visible ways.

These were people who made poor decisions like younger son that wrecked lives.  
And it bothered the Pharisees that Jesus was not laying down the law with them.

It bothered them he wasn't telling them what they had to do to make things right.  
It was like all their sinful decisions and actions didn't matter to Jesus—

and that meant their careful law-keeping and good behavior didn't matter either.  
Jesus treated them with mercy.

He ate with them and fellowshiped with them in mercy.

He treated them as loved and important children of God.

Let me go back to something I mentioned a minute ago that is important.

Both the younger son and the older son thought home was based on merit.

And that led to two very different, but equally damaging views of self.

In a merit-based system, the younger son blew it.

He did all the wrong things, wasted things, hurt people, wrecked his life.  
When he finally hit bottom how did he view himself?

I'm not worthy to be called your son. Condemnation, self-hatred, shame.  
How did the older son view himself according to the merit-based system?

Deserving. I've worked for you. Prideful, judgmental.

What did the younger son get? He got raised up from his shame and condemnation.

What did the older son get? He got gently humbled for his prideful attitude.  
Every one of us here is either a younger son or an older son.

We get there by a number of factors—personality, upbringing, experiences,  
nature of our own sins, visible or hidden.

Ask yourself as move into Advent and ponder again God's greatest gift—

Do I need to be raised up or gently humbled?

Lord, show me that home is a mercy.

### **MP#3 Home is a person**

When our children were little and went to spend the night with friends for the first  
few times they got homesick. Will didn't. But Adrienne and Eliza did.

We would get a phone call from the other mom about midnight.

She would put one of our weeping daughters on the phone.  
Come get me. I want to go home.  
They sounded pitiful.

But here's the thing, our girls have laughed about it.

They both agreed that as soon as they made the phone call, and as soon as they heard mom or dad say: Ok, I'll come get you (usually mom)—as soon as they heard that, homesickness went away.  
Why? They weren't home yet. You know why. Home is a person.

In the parable, who is that person? Well it's clearly the father.  
Who does the father represent in this parable? God the Father.

So our Father in heaven is watching and waiting and wants to fall on our neck and kiss us and cloth us in robes and rings and celebrate our return.  
It's a remarkable picture of the love of God.

But let me ask you question.

Where is Jesus himself in this parable?  
That's an important question because one of the age-old criticisms of Christianity is the cross. When we say that Jesus died on the cross for our sins, had to die. He had to die because sin deserves death, God as righteous judge must punish sin. So he became our substitute and died in our place.

You might not know it, because we're in a Christian bubble here in Cullman, but the notion of Jesus having to die, death for sin—critics of Christianity hate that.

They say it's a vengeful view of God. You Christians are saying God needs blood. God demands that someone pay. That's not God. God is loving. God just forgives. He's not bothered by our mistakes.

And guess what, this parable seems to support that.  
The younger son sows his wild oats and the father just forgives him.  
Nobody pays in this parable.  
Or do they?

Tim Keller had a sermon titled "The True Older Brother."  
He makes the point that it was only possible for the father to forgive the younger son and bring him back into the home at the expense of the older son.  
See, the younger son had already gotten his part of the inheritance and blown it.  
So everything else in the estate, every penny, now belonged to who?

The older son.  
It was legally his  
That means when the father gave the ring and the new robe and sandals and  
when he threw the party—he was taking all that from the older son's inheritance.

The father admits this.  
He says to his older son: Everything I have is yours.  
I admit it, son. You're paying for your brother's foolishness.  
But he's your brother and he's home.  
Don't you wonder how the older son responded?  
Was his heart melted? Or did he go off in a huff?  
Well, this is a parable. Jesus leaving the final conflict unresolved makes it great.

What's the ending we all want? We want the older son to say to his father:  
Take every penny of my inheritance you need to make things right.  
And then we imagine him running to the party, crashing in, the music stops.  
Everybody thinks, Uh oh—because they know what a straight arrow older son is.  
And they know he's the heir of whole estate and boss all answer too.  
But without hesitation gives a bear hug and says: Welcome home, little brother.

Here's Tim Keller's point. You have that true older brother. His name is Jesus.  
He's the Son of God, the heir of all creation.  
And yes, your sins did cost him. Someone had to pay and he did.  
Because, yes, God is a righteous judge and sin is an offense.  
Payment must be made.  
But because God the Father loves you and because God the Son loves you—  
the Son came to earth at Christmas, took on our human nature, became a man.  
And Jesus Christ joyfully, happily paid the price to bring you home.

All your longings—for something more, to be a part of something big, your  
longings for security and provision—Jesus is that for you.  
Your need for mercy when you sin.  
Your need for mercy when you're prideful and full of self—Jesus is that for you.  
Home is a person. Let's grow closer to that person this Advent.