

The story of two sons

A vital part of coming to know God is realizing how lost we are.

Jesus told a story about a man who had two sons, to teach us how we all, in some way, wander away from God's love. We rebel and we do not begin to return home until we realize our need for God again.

The story is in Luke 15.11-32.

All of us in our lives are on two journeys. There is an outer journey – which involves things like our school, work and significant relationships. There is also an inner journey – which involves our relationship with God. The story of the lost son is about our inner journey.

Where are you on your own inner journey?

- *Running away?*
- *Living far away, having a good time?*
- *Sensing your need of your heavenly Father?*
- *Turning round to come back?*
- *On your way home?*
- *In the arms of your Father?*
- *Like the elder brother – you've been a Christian so long you take it all for granted?*
- *Learning to take your place in the family?*
- *None of these or several of them?*

How easy or difficult do you find it to think of God as Father?

How do we know that we need God?

Our need for God is often well hidden – but the need for God is there in everyone.

1 The space in your heart

O Lord, You have made us for Yourself, and our hearts
are restless until they rest in You. St. Augustine

God made us so that we could learn to know Him and worship Him. If we don't have this relationship with God, something is missing. There is a space, an inner restlessness, in our lives.

People spend their whole lives trying to fill that space with all kinds of things. But in the end, nothing will satisfy, except the living God.

Spend some time pooling your ideas on how people try and fill up that inner space. You can recognize that inner space in your own life by asking yourself these questions:

- *Do I have a sense of purpose?*
- *Do I have a sense of inner peace in my life?*
- *Do I have a longing to be loved?*

You can discover how people try to fill the empty space in their lives by completing the following sentences:

- "My world would crash if . . . "
- "They can take everything away from me, as long as they keep their hands off . . . " (think of a relationship with a certain person or health).

God promises to give to each one who comes home a new sense of purpose, of peace and of love (Matthew 11:28-30).

2 The chaos in creation

All through history, men and women have longed for stability, security, peace, freedom and justice. We have only to look at the world around us to realize that these things are hard to attain. Something deep within us cries out to God for salvation not simply for ourselves but for the whole world.

3 The walls we build

We are separated and cut off from God by:

- *Our sin*

The Bible shows that at bottom sin is a failure to live in community of love with God and each other.

- *Our pride*

We hate to admit that we are not number one. Something inside us hates to surrender, hates to worship. Pride is the root of all human sin and tragedy.

- *Our guilt*

The wrong things we do and say and are have a serious effect on other people and on ourselves. We think that God cannot forgive us, or give us a new beginning.

- *Our unwillingness to change*

Coming to God means change – all sorts of change. Much of the time we do not like the idea, so another part of the wall goes up.

4 Our fear of the future

One day each of us will die. We don't like to think about it. We cover up our fear of death. No one wants to die. The Bible is very clear. Not everyone will enjoy eternal life. Through Jesus the offer of eternal life is made to all. But many reject it.

For reflection

This week, think about your own need of God: your own restlessness and sin and fear. Read Psalm 51 and use the psalm as a prayer. Remember each day that God loves you and is calling you home.

Begin reading the gospel of Luke this week. Try to read a little bit every day.