

## Coming Home (Again)

When you think about the home you grew up in, what do you think about?

For the lucky few, there are only fond memories of warmth and joy.

For others, there are terrible memories of abuse, alienation and arguments.

For most of us, we probably recall a childhood somewhere in between, with a mix of good and bad times.

Indeed, our childhood homes are very often full of contradictions and paradox.

On the one hand, many of us perhaps have fond memories of holiday celebrations and extended families enjoying a summer day at the beach.

But during those same celebrations and times away, there are also the memories of unmet expectations.

And who can forget the teasing and ridicule?

Sometimes meant as a joke, but still painful.

And because our childhood upbringing is so crucial to our development as human and spiritual beings, today's gospel lesson brings front and center our absolute need to face and confront our childhood traumas.

To face and confront the expectations others impose on us — especially those expectations that don't ring true.

To take a hard look at our formative relationships, in the glaring light of brutal, and fearless, honesty.

To face where we were and what was endured, so that in the facing of it, we might leave it all behind.

How many of us have grown up with expectations we cannot meet?

Whether those expectations involve who we marry?

Who we love?

The career we choose?

Or even our most sacred and intimate identities: about gender and sexual orientation?

How many of us are stuck in childhood roles?

Even as the calendar tells us we are now half a century old?

How many of us still look in the mirror and see the little boy being scolded by a stern mom?

Or the little girl who can never please her uptight dad, try as she might?

It's no wonder psychologists call all of the things that we grow up with "baggage."

It's the same baggage Jesus himself is burdened with as he returns home today.

He's been doing amazing things from Makaha to Kahuku.

But today he shows up at his Mayor Wright apartment in Palama and it's all: "who does he think he is?"

"We know this kid, and he's nothing special!"

So it's no wonder that as Jesus sends his followers out on their first spiritual journey, the very first instruction he gives them is: "leave your baggage behind!"

When he tells them "forget your iPhone and Visa card and only take the clothes on your back," he's not only telling them to leave all that material stuff behind, what he's really saying is:

"leave who **you think you are** behind."

The boxes that others put you in growing up.

The stereotypes you think you must squeeze into.

The expectations you've tried your whole life to live up to.

"Leave who **you think you are** behind."

Because these fishermen and tax collectors and former prostitutes who are sent out, return from their adventures not as fisherman or tax collectors or former prostitutes, but as emissaries of God.

If only for a little while.

They return having had a glimpse of "their true face," as the Buddha puts it.

That face we are each of us sent with, into this world, by God.

The face that we shall spend a lifetime seeking to rediscover.

So how do we take the first step on this journey?

Perhaps the best way to open our minds to our true nature, to our true destiny, is by letting go of fear.

The disciples go out with nothing, so that they may come to see that they already possess everything!

They return having been fed, accepted, welcomed and loved.

They return also having faced rejection, persecution and hate.

But they have set out in search of their authentic self.

And when we are willing to do that, the obstacles never have the last word.

How many of us worry that if we claim our true selves, we might lose those we deem nearest and dearest?

And yet, opening ourselves, pushing out of those tiny boxes that for far too long keep us in limited and tiny lives, opens up a whole new world.

Even when that opening brings challenges.

Even when that opening brings rejection, even the loss of loved ones.

As the philosopher says:

“Don’t fear the bad stuff in life.

The disappointments.

The failures.

The loss.

Because in everything that comes our way is the hand of God!

Shaping us into who and what we’re meant to be.

That being “human” is a lot like being a “guest house.”

Every morning some new arrival lands on our doorstep.

Its name may be joy.

Or depression.

Or meanness.

It may be that the uninvited visitor is called ‘momentary awareness’ or ‘insight.’

Whoever they are, whatever they are, welcome and entertain them!

Even if they seem no more than a parade of sorrows.

Even if they sweep away everything in your house.

Treat them honorably.

They may be clearing you out for an unexpected delight!

This dark thought.

That shame or malice.

Meet them all at the door — and smile!

Invite them in!

Be grateful for whoever and whatever comes.

Because each is sent as a precious guide from beyond.” Rumi (modified).

Isn't that what Paul is getting at this morning when he boasts not about money or success or holiness — but about his weakness?

“Therefore I am content with weakness, insults, hardship, persecution, and calamities for the sake of Christ; for whenever I am weak, then I am strong.” 2 Cor. 12:10.

And what about that thorn in his side?

No one knows what it is, and probably that's for the best.

Since we all of us have our own thorn that we need to work on constantly.

The thorn of insecurity or not measuring up for some.

For others, it's a thorn of ego or greed or porn.

These thorns don't disqualify us from the kingdom.

To the contrary, they are a necessary part of our journey to that delightful destination.

Which is why St Paul seems to be saying, it's not through our coolness, but through our cracks, that God's light at long last shines into the world.

This morning, Jesus invites us, cracks and all, to leave behind the baggage of how others define us, and to take that first step onto this new road, whose happy destiny — is God's kingdom.

Jesus invites us to embrace this truth: we aren't defined by other people.

No!

We are each of us called to become the person God created at the very start of it all.

And sometimes that means upsetting those who, while they may not know us the best, have known us the longest.

Becoming our true self may mean changing jobs.

Or changing relationships.

Changing one's identity.

Or one's sense of who I really am.

All of which takes us to that place of seeing ourselves, not through the eyes of someone else's expectations, but through the eyes of God.

Chances are we will stumble and fall as often as we move forward.

Even the apostles, those who know Jesus best, return to their old jobs, their old lives, after his crucifixion.

Until Jesus meets them on the beach that morning.

Grilling some fish on the fire.

As he sends them out again into the brave new world — of their brave new lives.

Which is why we show up here, week in and week out.

The lure of our old ways is a powerful force.

But here, we meet Jesus yet again, as he sends us out with the same joy that sent the apostles.

Today, Jesus says: "let go of your baggage!"

Discover your true self!

Go out onto the road — carrying only hope!

Trusting in the kindness of strangers!"

When we return, when the Lord asks: "Did you lack anything?"



We too can smile and say:

“Nothing, sir!”

+amen