

“LET’S GO TO THE MOVIES!
I – THERE’S NO PLACE LIKE HOME!”

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Luke 15:11-24

The great preacher Tony Campolo taught for many, many years at Eastern College in St. David’s, Pennsylvania. He was a favorite of students – most of his classes had a wait list of students waiting to get in. Besides wanting to have him as their professor, they also sought Tony out for advice and counsel. In that vein, Tony says that he lost count of the number of students who, over the years, came to him to tell him they were going to drop out of college. And when he asked them why, invariably the answer was, “I need to find myself.” They felt like something was missing, and they were going to spend time finding it.

Well, that journey is one that a whole lot of people take, including a whole lot of people we’re going to consider this morning. The first one shows up in the Gospel lesson – the younger son whom we have come to call “the prodigal son.” When he went to his father and asked for his inheritance ahead of time, he was pretty much saying, “I need to find myself. Being around here is doing nothing for me. I’ve got to go and figure things out, figure out how who I am and what life’s all about.” What he didn’t say, but what he was surely thinking was, “There’s got to be more to life than this farm. There’s got to be more for me than this life.”

So off he went, searching, trying to find himself.

There’s a few other characters we’re going to look at this morning who were searching as well. They show up in a movie from 1939, a classic entitled “The Wizard of Oz.” I daresay most, if not almost everyone in this room, has seen “The Wizard of Oz” at one time or another in their life. It used to be on once a year, and one of my earliest memories of the movie was that I was afraid of those flying monkeys.

Nevertheless, you’ll recall that three of the main characters were the Tin Man, the Scarecrow and the Cowardly Lion. When Dorothy, the leading character, found herself in Oz by way of a tornado, she met up with these three – and discovered that all of them, and she herself, were searching for something. The Tin Man – well, he was searching for a heart. The Scarecrow – brains. And the Cowardly Lion, courage. Dorothy was searching for home.

The movie is about their search. They have all sorts of adventures, including trying to escape from the clutches of the Wicked Witch. But, in the end, they finally get to the Wizard of Oz, sure that he is the answer to their searching.

Alas, what they discover instead, is that the wizard is really no wizard, and has no magical powers. He's just a guy, a plain old guy. But he helps them realize that they hadn't needed to search at all – because the things they were searching for were there all along.

For on the journey it was clear – the Tin Man's love shone on those around him, the Scarecrow's brain helped them know what to do, and the Cowardly Lion showed courage in the face of danger. The things that they were searching for had been there all along.

But then there was Dorothy. Her search? Well, take a look and see how it ends.

Film Clip from “The Wizard of Oz”

“There's no place like home. There's no place like home.” What Dorothy said was true, and though she didn't realize it, she was there all along.

I think the prodigal son was probably thinking those exact words as well, when he saw his father running towards him with open arms of love, grace and forgiveness. “There's no place like home. This is where I belong. This is where I'm loved. There is where I was meant to be. This is where all is well.”

Oh friends, like Tony Campolo's college students, like the characters in that movie, like the prodigal son, we too sometimes go searching, don't we? We look for something more. We might feel unworthy, that we're not enough, that we're not good enough, that we're all alone. And so we search, looking for answers, looking for meaning.

Each of the characters we've looked at this morning, interestingly, found the answer to their searching in very tangible ways. The Tin Man received a testimonial medal of a heart showing how much his love mattered to others, the Scarecrow a diploma indicating his intellectual prowess, the Cowardly Lion a badge of courage showing that he indeed, like the others, were not who they thought they were, but so much more. And for Dorothy, it was a pair of ruby slippers that transported her back to a place that she had actually never left – a place called home!

The Prodigal Son found his answer in the embrace of his crying father – an embrace that said he was forgiven, and loved, and valued. An embrace he never, ever expected, but an embrace that told him his search was over – he was loved and worthy and back home where he belonged.

In tangible ways, friends, God shows us the truth of who we are, and we'll see that this morning in the bread and wine of holy communion. If, for whatever reason, you are searching today, if something is missing or you feel unworthy or alone, may you see in the bread and wine that you are home. You are home in the arms of God. You are home in the arms of God who loved you so much he sent his Son for you – that you might have life in all its abundance. You need not look any further than this sign of bread and wine to know that you are home, and you are loved, just as you are.

Dorothy was right, "There's no place like home!" You are home, friends. You are home. Right here. Right now. As you come for communion, and receive the bread and cup, may you feel God's arms reaching out to embrace you just as surely as did that dear prodigal son and know that you are loved – truly, deeply and completely. May it be so.

Amen.