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Prodigal Son Returns: Forgiveness

Joshua: God provides, get to work

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So the gods shake us from our sleep. -**Mary Oliver**

What grace to be alive and know the day in all its sweetness! -**Ram Dass**

### Ballroom Dancing

In intimate moments, you have been touched by something you cannot yet endure or carry, but you still love the touch and the invitation to carry. You are always larger after any intimate encounter; in fact, it might well be the only way to enlarge spiritually. It is always grace.

—Richard Rohr

**Robben Island** is famous. It is the South African prison where Nelson Mandela and many others were incarcerated because of their struggle to end apartheid. (Mandela served 18 of his 27 years in Robben Island). Margaret Wheatley tells this story of a time that she had the unique privilege of touring Robben Island (now a UNESCO World Heritage Centre). The tour group stood in a long narrow room that had been used as a prison cell for dozens of freedom fighters. Picture yourself in a space crowded, cramped and barren. The prisoners lived without cots or furniture, cement floors now their beds. The only light entered through narrow windows near the ceiling.

The tour group listened to their guide's narration. "I was a prisoner in this very room," the guide tells them. The gravity of his words comingles with the cold seeping up through the floor. There is a chill.

The group stares through prison bars, surveys the lifeless cell, and tries to imagine the stories about the suffering from relentless threats and capricious brutality.

The guide pauses, as if remembering, gazing the length of his former cell. Speaking quietly, almost a whisper, he says, "Sometimes, to pass the time here, we taught each other ballroom dancing."

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Okay, when I first read this story, I wasn't ready for that ending. Even with the gut-wrenching bleakness, I confess to grinning, and then, laughing out loud.

Ballroom dancing? A group of demoralized and weary men, beaten down and brutalized, teaching one another to dance. You gotta love it.

And yes, we know that "it is wiser to light a candle than to curse the darkness." But let's be honest.

Sometimes life is dark and not fun. Adversity is real. Life can be cruel. (People can be crueler.) Suffering happens. Suffering hurts. We reach a tipping point. And prison walls are made of real concrete. And finding a candle is not always easy, let alone the motivation to light it.

The medicine of intimacy  
That's why I love this story.  
Because it is so counterintuitive.  
Let me get this straight, in times of anxiety or fear or suffering or distress—when our equilibrium is catawampus—we are invited to open our heart? We are invited to dance? The prisoners would say yes. That in adversity, the medicine of intimacy allows us to become more human. That even times of sorrow or discontent can become fertile ground for generosity of spirit, mystery, delight, touch, tenderness, vulnerability, risk and yes, even gladness.

That doesn't make sense, because **our tendency is to shut down. To**

**let our heart constrict.** Or to appear tough and self-sufficient. Or to find safe haven. Or at the very least, to find an enemy. With an enemy, at least there is someone to blame for all this muddle. The irony is that in every choice above (and they are choices), we relinquish or surrender our very ability to choose.

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Our heart tells us to resonate with this sentiment to dance. And then, we hope that someone will provide us with the instructions. You know, a check-list. Because with instructions, we will learn to dance correctly.

Here's the deal: Somehow, we do not believe it—the dance, the perseverance, the light, the tenderness, the intimacy, the whole-heartedness—is already within us.

Where there is no love, put love and you will find love. —St. John of the Cross

### Love is courage

The word vulnerable itself comes from the Latin vulnerare which means "to wound," and so at the root of vulnerability is my own sense of woundedness. To be authentic in a moment in which I feel wounded, I have to honestly acknowledge the places where I feel hurt and then muster up the strength to just be with the pain. This takes tremendous courage. Literally speaking, courage comes from the Latin cor, meaning heart. So when I open up to any experience fully, with courage—whole hearted—it naturally opens me up to a deep love. And the good news? The blind musician Facundo Cabral said it beautifully: "If you are filled with love, you can't have fear, because love is courage." True vulnerability, in its most profound form, is an act of love.

Ballroom dancing indeed.

Live Wholehearted: Making Space  
for Wonder and Delight

Richard Rohr reminds us, "It is woundedness transformed. You still carry your scars forever, as both message and trophy. They still "hurt" in a way, which keeps you mindful and humble, but they no longer allow you to hurt other people. Pain transformed is no longer pain transmitted."  
In other words, pain transformed becomes a dance that fuels a fire that changes the world around me.

After Nelson Mandela was released from prison he ran for office and was elected president of South Africa in 1994. His message? Forgiveness. I gotta admit, that's not a common political platform these days. And then cynicism abounded. Many assuming that his declaration was lip service. And yet, something within his core allowed him to rise above situations, and surprise others with strength. He began with his staff, keeping both Afrikaners and Black. There was understandable tension. In a scene from the movie *Invictus*, Nelson Mandela models the behavior, telling his guard (who was certain this new integrated South Africa would not work):

The rainbow nation starts here  
recognition starts here forgiveness  
starts here too forgiveness  
liberates the souls it removes fear  
that is why it is such a powerful  
weapon so please, try.  
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for Wonder and Delight

After time change weekend, the reality of winter sets in here. It gets dark early now, as if the day's dimmer switch is set on hunker down by late afternoon. It is overcast tonight, but last night, the sky itself appeared to pause, between storms. The clouds to the southwest congregate as if calling a truce, and a waning half-moon rests on the azure November sky.

Looking up at the sky, I realize that there is just enough light to walk out onto the patio and dance.

REFLECTION FOR THE DAY

When you let go of trying to get more of what you don't really need, it frees up oceans of energy to make a difference with what you have. When you make a difference with what you have it expands.

—Lynne Twist

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*What fun it was doing object meditation and giving focus to Spring and new life. Give a read to Psalm 32, Joshua 5:9-12, 2 Corinthians 5:16-21; and Luke 15 prior to church attendance this weekend. Let the Word speak to you and then see if you and the presider got the same ideas. Let God speak to you?. Even though the prodigal seems so familiar, let God speak again, anew, and from above to you. We are all 'born again'.*

*Kids are ready for their 'spring break', note that they no longer have Easter Break (too religious). So, folks, you need to talk up Easter, share the joy, share the Word. You are a disciple, saved, and Christian. Say so.*

*Check out the local happenings for community growing and check out opportunities for personal growth. Topics for growth offered by whomever are always open to anyone. No excuse! If you are alive you need to keep being informed. KatieD*