



HOME COMING

By Marilyn Sharpe

This is homecoming season. High schools and colleges have a weekend of football and festivities, welcoming students, their families, and alumnae back. It is a time when we celebrate a sense of belonging and connection and pride that survives a summer, or even years, apart.

So what does this have to do with families of faith and positive parenting? It is a wonderful reminder that God welcomes us and declares it a homecoming, whenever we gather with family, with faith family, with this loving God, who wants us to come home to God's presence every day.

A month ago, our precious, newest grandson, Bennett Alfred Sharpe was born. He was welcomed into the circle of a loving family that had yearned for him, prepared for him, and prayed for him. His mother and father had prepared a room and clothing, cradle and car seat, toys and baby book for him. His homecoming ... to both his family and his home ... was a joyous celebration. Homecoming, indeed.

Just hours before Bennett's birth, we gathered as a family to celebrate the marriage of our beloved niece and her wonderful husband. Family gathered from Norway and the US. Friends from high school, college, and work gathered. Both godparents were there. For Christy and Ole, this was a time of gathering family and friends and launching their marriage and their life together. Homecoming, indeed.

Soon, Bennett will be baptized, named and claimed, now and forever, by the One who created and redeemed him. We will gather at the font to hear Jesus' words again, naming and claiming Bennett, telling him to let his light shine so that others will see Christ's light, and reminding all of us to journey with this precious little boy and his family, so that he sees Jesus every day of his life. Homecoming, indeed.

Holidays, holy days of gathering and celebration, also offer us times of homecoming. We may return to family homes. We always return to the rituals and traditions that give us identity and nurture faith in all the generations. Homecoming, indeed.

Daily, we have a chance to welcome one another home, after school or work or daycare or volunteering. Instead of a perfunctory, "Hi," followed by a grand inquisition, "Did you carry in the trash cans?," "Do you have homework tonight?," "Where have you been all this time?," could we learn to first welcome this child of God with a warm, "Hello. I am so glad to see you. I've missed you today." First, welcome. Then, we can ask the burning questions. Homecoming, indeed.

But sometimes, someone we love has gone to "a far country," as the younger son does in Jesus' Parable of the Prodigal Son. God continues to call to the loved and distant one. When the call of love is heard, the one who feels outside the circle of home and family, having abdicated the right to belong, hears God's call to "come home," and returns. Remember, the wronged and violated father does not sit in his study, waiting for the wandering, squandering son, to come home, groveling to be allowed to work as a servant. No, God's model for us is the father, who with no thought for his dignity or propriety, races down the road to welcome his son home, to clothe him with robe and sandals and ring, to throw a celebration. Can we learn from Jesus to welcome one another home? Homecoming, indeed.



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Bennett bears the middle name of his maternal grandfather, the only grandparent who was not there to welcome Bennett. Larry Alfred Smith had celebrated a very different kind of homecoming on February 21, 2009, when he entered eternal life with his Lord and Savior. A joyous homecoming for Larry, it was a sorrowful leave taking from all who loved him here. Hope is anchored in Jesus' promise that, because of His death and resurrection, one day we will all be reunited with Him, with all those we have loved. Now, that will be a homecoming, indeed.

Can't we begin now to celebrate homecomings in our daily lives, a foretaste of the homecoming to come?

FAMILY ACTIVITIES

- Plan to greet each person in your family as they come home at the end of the day. Tell them how much they were missed, how much they are loved, and listen, listen, listen to their life stories of the day.
- At the next gathering of family or friends, offer a prayer of thanks for gathering, for all you mean to one another, for homecoming.
- For someone who lives far away, send a care package with foods they love, with photos of family, with notes or pictures that say how much they are missed.
- Heal a rift in relationship with a family member or friend. As a family, read the Parable of the Prodigal, Luke 15:11-32. Talk about how God forgives us and welcomes us home, so we are to do that with others.