THE PIGPEN OF LIFE
Luke 15:20b

As the story goes in the parable of the Prodigal Son, the youngest one sets out and goes as far as he can to get away from his father and familiar surroundings. It doesn’t take long for him to waste all his money and possessions and land in the pigpen of a foreigner feeding the swine.

What is the ‘pigpen of life?’ I’m thinking that it is a pretty horrible place and represents our greatest fears. My guess is that most people will find themselves there in one way or another at some point in time. It doesn’t matter whether we put ourselves there or someone puts us there; or circumstances of life just happen and one day we awaken to a new reality beyond anything we could imagine. It is a solitary place of ultimate vulnerability where our sensibilities about ourselves are diminished.

I love this passage because the father has been waiting and watching for his son. I know that surely must be what God does. God waits and watches for us. Nothing seems to catch God off guard, nor even our rebellious ways. God sees our restless side, our need to go our own way, and does not hold it against us. No word spoken, no action taken, no thought is so horrible or sinister that God turns away from us completely.

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How wonderful to have a God who watches and waits and who welcomes us back with gracious, healing love! Amen.

Rev. Cathy Gilliard

JESUS WEEPS
Luke 19:41-44

In this nineteenth chapter of Luke, we read and watch as Jesus spends his last week on earth. After his triumphant entry into Jerusalem, we have this emotional scene as Jesus weeps over the city. I feel the same way as we weep over Brussels.

Jesus teaches us what to do when tragedy strikes: accept our mortality, bless outcasts, seek healing, and keep doing what we are called to do—love God, love our neighbors, and love ourselves. As Jesus wept over Jerusalem, we weep for Brussels.

Today’s bombings confront us with a stark reality: in the face of global terrorism, we are all vulnerable. Yet, like Jesus, we must continue on the path of peace and love.

What can we do to survive the darkness of terror? Along with so many, I will arise with hope and peace tomorrow morning. I will keep that journey towards Jerusalem and the darkness of the cross of Calvary that will grow deeper, and then, I will await the dawn of Easter morn and the promise of light and life that it means. I will lift up prayers on behalf of those who suffer because of the terrorists. I will keep my eyes focused on the ultimate goal, for the hope of new life, for the salvation poured out on the earth through Jesus’s ultimate sacrifice for us.

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Lord, we wake up to the news of another terrorist attack and lives changed forever. These places of attack seem so far away. But we are joined in our fear, our horror, our grief, our powerlessness. And yet, in this week, we remember that though there is evil in this world, there is a Love that is greater. There is a Love that overcomes even death. For those who suffer, send your comfort. For those who fear, send your presence. For those who grieve, send your healing love. Amen.
SOURCE OF LOVE

John 15:12

The ‘Love Commands’ come in three different forms in the New Testament. The first is, “Love your neighbor as yourself” (Matthew 19:19).

The second is found in John 15:12, where Jesus says, “Love each other just as I have loved you.” Jesus goes on to say that he is laying down his life for the disciples and expects them to do the same for each other. The Greek word for “love” in this passage is agape and can be translated as “self-giving” or “self-sacrificing” love.

The third command can be found in the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus says, “You have heard that it was said, You must love your neighbor and hate your enemy. But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who harass you” (Matthew 5:43-44).

Loving our enemies is really challenging. This is especially true if our enemy has harmed us or seeks to harm those we love. However, this love of enemies illustrates the uniqueness of Christian love: it doesn’t depend on our feelings—it depends on our willingness to act in love. Another way of saying this is that Christian love is “blind.”

Who are the persons you find it challenging to love? How can you act in their best interests?

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Source of Love, you call us to love as you have loved us. Sometimes this is so very difficult. Give us the strength and resolve to love all of your children. Amen.

Robert Martin Walker

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DARE TO BE

Proverbs 29:7

During the early eight hundreds, a flood of immigrants from Europe came to the lower east side of New York City and worked in unsafe conditions in sweatshops for unfair wages. Many lived in conditions of squalor, gang activity, addiction, hunger, and abuse—and children were victimized.

It was to these conditions that the compassionate concern for the needs of children and their mothers gave birth to the zeal of the Methodists to organize ways to feed, educate, and uplift people from chains of poverty.

In the 1830s, the Methodist women of New York City noticed that nothing was being done by politicians or social groups to help the children, so they set out to make a difference at the risk of their own personal safety and health.

In the spirit of John Wesley and the evangelical fires of Methodism—using the Bible as their textbook—these women, rather than hosting camp meetings and crusades, began to teach the poorest children to read. Soon, about 500 children were attending classes and enjoying lunch in a safe, clean environment. These “Sunday schools” eventually touched the lives of thousands of boys and girls.

This was the origin of the societies that became the United Methodist City Society. Today, I celebrate this wonderful diversity and our ministry with immigrants, especially those undocumented who use our Far Rockaway Mission for food and support.

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Awaken my heart, Lord, to those you care about, including the poor and helpless, the hungry and homeless, the troubled and hopeless in our world. Amen.