

Sunday 20 April 2008
Church of the Ascension, Hilton

“Home” [John 14:1-14]

Sermon notes used by Nic Denny-Dimitriou; Extensive reference and quote from notes from The Rev. Dr. Joseph S. Pagano, Emmanuel Episcopal Church, Baltimore, MD.

~~~~~

What is a home? When you think of the word, what comes to mind? Perhaps you think of a brick building, or one of other materials. Perhaps you think of home as a shelter from the storm, a place of refuge. [Or perhaps home itself is a place of storms?]

Perhaps when you hear the word "home," you think of the hopes and dreams of the people who inhabit a home. Ideally it is a place where people build and share a life together, where husbands and wives and families share the hopes and hurts, and the joys and sorrows of life. Perhaps when you hear the word "home" you think of a place of comfort, a place where you feel safe and whole. What do you think of when you hear the word "home"?

There are well-known clichés as well: Some say home is where the heart is; others say home is where you hang your hat. Robert Frost once wrote, "Home is the place, where when you have to go there, they have to take you in."

Somehow, "home" has a special place in the human heart. It seems as though we are all longing for a place to call home. Many of you probably know the traditional folk song "I Want to Go Home." If you're familiar with the version by Van Morrison, you can hear the lyrics in his growling voice singing, "I want to go home. I feel so broke up, Lord, that I want to go home."

This is a song echoed in every human heart. Whenever we feel lonely or abandoned, we want to go home. Whenever we are filled with doubt or despair, whenever we feel lost, we want to go home. "Lord, sometimes I feel so broke up, that I want to go home."

"To feel at home" is a lovely expression. "Make yourself at home," we tell close friends who visit us. It also expresses the deepest longings of the human heart. St. Augustine gave famous expression to this longing when he wrote of God, "You have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in thee" – as I quoted in my sermon two weeks ago, speaking about Resurrection Power.

Somehow our restless hearts are always looking for a place to rest, a place to find true and abiding peace, a place to call home.

"Lord, you have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in thee."

"Lord, sometimes I feel so broke up, that I want to go home."

Much of our human experience can be summed up in those two phrases. In the good times and the bad times, we are all longing for a place called home.

In our gospel lesson for today, we hear words that speak directly to the longing of the human heart for a home. Jesus says, "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go to prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may also be."

This comes from a section of John's gospel called Jesus' "Farewell Address." In it, Jesus is preparing his disciples for the time when he will no longer be with them in the flesh. They must have been broken-hearted. But Jesus assures them that even though their relationship is changing, it is not ending. Even though he will no longer be with them in the flesh, they will remain connected. Jesus is going to prepare a place for them in his Father's house, where they will remain united to him forever, "so that where I am, there you may be also."

Our true home is with God, and Jesus, who comes from the very heart of God, is preparing a place for his disciples in God's home. Our true home, ultimately, is not a place, but a relationship, a relationship in the heart of God, made possible by Christ, eternal in the heavens. Lord, you have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in thee.

As we are regularly reminded, even though the fullness of this relationship remains in our future, even now we can know the reality of this relationship and experience a foretaste of this eternal home. When we do the works that Christ commands us to do, when we love one another as Christ loved us and gave himself for us, then God's love will dwell in us, then God's love will make a home in us. When the broken-hearted are comforted, then God will make a home with us. When people lay down their lives for one another, then God will make a home with us. When all of God's children are invited to God's table to share in his body and blood, then God will make a home with us.

In her memoir, *Traveling Mercies*, Anne Lamott writes about why she stays so close to her church. She tells of their pastor Veronica who sings to them from the pulpit and who tells them stories of when she was a child. In one story she tells about a time when she was 7 years old and her best friend got lost. "The little girl ran up and down the streets of the big town where they lived, but she couldn't find a single landmark. She was frightened. Finally a policeman stopped to help her. He put her in the passenger seat of his car, and they drove around until she finally saw her church. She pointed it out to the policeman, and then she told him firmly, 'You can let me out now. This is my church, and I can always find my way home from here.'"

Lamott writes, "And that is why I have stayed so close to mine - because no matter how bad I am feeling, how lost or lonely or frightened, when I see the faces of the people at my church, when I hear their voices, I can always find my way home."

"Lord, sometimes I feel so broke up, that I want to go home."

"Lord, you have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in thee."

**CLOSING PRAYER:**

We give thanks to You, Lord God, for in Jesus Christ You have conquered the power of death and enabled us to face our own death and the loss of those we love with trust and confidence. Help us to live with joyful anticipation of entering the heavenly places where our Lord dwells with you and the Holy Spirit eternally. AMEN.

~~~~~

PRAYER OF APPROACH

(used at the start of worship)

God of teeming galaxies and the great empty freeways of space,
we approach you with loving awe.

God of mother earth, of sunlit mountains and moonlit deserts,
we approach you with loving awe.

God of countless millennia and the rise and fall of cultures and empires,
we approach you with loving awe.

God of incarnation and redemption, of the dying and rising Christ,
we approach you with loving awe.

As we gather here to worship you,
open our minds to your truth,
our souls to your beauty,
and our hearts to your grace.

Through Jesus Christ our Lord; AMEN

(Bruce D. Prewer, Easter 4A, 2002)