

Acts 2:14a, 36-41
1 Peter 1:17-23
Luke 24:13-35
Psalm 116:1-3, 10-17

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“Home is Where the Heart Is”

“Home is where the heart is.” How many times have we heard this ancient proverb and are taken back to images of where we grew up or where we live now. The word “home” can evoke a flood of memories, hopefully mostly good ones but the memories may be painful as well for many, depending on your circumstances.

Growing up as an Army brat we moved numerous times and lived all over the world. I called a number of different places “home.” From a tiny house with rice paper walls situated beside a rice paddy in post WW II Japan; to an apartment in an old many-storied red brick building that was once a huge field house that faced the football field where Jim Thorpe once played in Pennsylvania; to a simple duplex on a military post in Kansas where every day at 5 o'clock sharp, everyone stopped whatever they were doing to the sound of a bugle playing retreat to signal the end of the day when the United States flag was lowered from the flag pole; to a large tropical home on stilts with tiny green geckos running up and down the walls to keep the mosquito population under control. The house, framed by the jungle on three sides, was perched on a high hill overlooking Gatun Lake, a huge body of water created when the Panama Canal was built. These are just a few of the many places I have called “home.”

Even though the physical structure of each place we lived in was different from one to the next, what made it “home” was the people I shared these spaces with. The presence of my family made whatever house, a duplex, an apartment we lived in at the time into a “home.” You may be experiencing this now if are sheltering in place with your family, a partner or close friend. *Relationships that are anchored in bonds of self-giving love have the power to transform any space we occupy into a sacred space, a holy place where we feel loved, safe, cared for and are at home.* These are the kind of loving relationships that endure. They hold fast and provide us with a firm foundation upon which we can plant our feet and weather any storm that may come our way, even death itself. Who doesn't yearn for a place like this? I think this is especially true when we are facing a crisis, or when we are suffering or frightened such as the time we are living in now. This is the message Jesus is telling his disciples as he prepares to leave them to face his own death.

This is the last night Jesus will spend with his inner circle of friends. They have shared their last Passover meal together in the upper room and Jesus has just finished washing their feet, showing them what it means to be a servant to all in the name of love. In the meantime Judas has snuck out to do his dirty work of betrayal, telling the ruling authorities of Jesus' whereabouts in exchange for 30 pieces of silver – blood money. It is only a few hours before Jesus is arrested,

beaten and crucified on a cross. The air is filled with tension and fear as Jesus gives his final farewell to his disciples.

Even though Jesus has tried to prepare his friends for what is to come they still have no idea what to expect. Jesus understands they are confused and struggling so he tries to assure them saying, “do not let your hearts be troubled” (John 14:1). I think, if truth be told, Jesus is saying this to himself as well, knowing that soon he will be surrendering to a most ugly and terrifying death. He goes on to tell them in a few short words the one essential thing they need to do. “Believe in God, believe also in me” (v. 1). Martin Luther, theologian and reformer, wrote that the first commandment - *You shall have no other gods but me* – essentially means that “God is what you hang your heart on.”¹ Jesus is telling his troubled friends that now is the time to trust, to make a commitment, to follow his lead – to hang your heart on God and to hang your heart on Jesus.² When the world seems to be collapsing in on itself and we find ourselves floundering about, often this when we come to the sobering realization that the things of this world that we have relied upon are only transitory. They do not last. With time they will crumble and pass away. This is not where we hang our hearts. It is God alone and his only Son that endure for all of eternity. And this what Jesus is pointing to on his last night on earth.

Jesus tells them in his Father’s house there are many dwelling places and he will go ahead to prepare a place for his disciples. In time, he will come and take them to this place himself. Full of confusion Thomas asks Jesus to explain. Jesus responds with an even more mysterious, almost cryptic response. “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” (v. 6). It is being in relationship with God and with his Son, the Word made flesh, that we discover the path way to eternal life. These “rooms” that Jesus speaks of are places within the very heart of God and Jesus that we are invited to dwell now and for all of eternity. Even the bonds of death are not strong enough to sever this enduring, intimate relationship with the divine. *This passage is often misunderstood and used to exclude those from other faiths who are on their own journey. It is important to note that this gospel was originally written for the members of the Johannine community to deepen their faith and their commitment to Christ Jesus. Jesus excludes no one from the loving embrace of the one, true living God.*

Frustrated and lost Philip speaks for all of us when asks Jesus to show us the Father, hoping to get some insight into what Jesus is talking about. Jesus responds, “Whoever has seen the Father has seen me” (v. 9). God is revealed in the person of Jesus, God dwells in him and Jesus in God. It is apparent that even though they have spent three years with him, witnessing miracles where water is turned into wine, the blind can now see and the lame are made to walk, the disciples still do not know who Jesus truly is.

The truth is no one has seen God and yet, in our moments of darkness, when we feel we are at our wits end worrying about our kids or our aging parents or fearful that this pandemic will never end, or, afraid we might lose our job, we yearn to believe and trust in God – a God that no one can see or may doubt even exists. Yet, it is during such moments when we are at our weakest and brought to our knees, desperate for a sign of hope, this is when we are most vulnerable and

¹ Cynthia A. Jarvis, *Feasting on the Word, Year A, vol. 2*, (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster), 2010, p.467.

² Jarvis, 469.

closest to God. We find God in the Word made flesh, Jesus, who dwelt among us that we might have life and have it abundantly. This is possible only by the loving relationship between the Father and the Son that welcomes us home, to a place of perfect love where we may dwell, be comforted and cared for as one of God's beloved. If we dare to take Jesus at his word and hang our heart on God and hang our heart on Jesus, we will find our way home to the love that does not die. Therefore our hearts need not be troubled for we are already dwelling in eternity.

Amen.