

Christmas Day 2022
The Rev. Curtis Metzger
On Finding Home

Every year at Christmas I think of what home means. I suppose it's a combination of things – Mary and Joseph being 'homeless' in Bethlehem, the house we bought up here and how we have settled in and made it 'home', and the memories of Christmases past with mom and dad and all the family.

A sense of home is so important to each of us. As an army brat growing up home was wherever my family was that night, so between postings sometimes home was a motel room – but there was always a promise of having a new home in a new community or on base. And, as is common for military families, home is also your hometown, so for us it was also Wilmington, Ohio, where both my parents were from. The memory of both our grandparents' homes was an anchor when we were feeling homeless.

We would often get home to Wilmington at Christmas and the 5 kids would be farmed out to various relations. My paternal grandparents had a 2 story, 3 bedroom home on a small lot in town, but it had a nice big dining room where we would have Christmas dinner. The table could easily sit 14-

so no kids table! My mother's grandparents had a big Victorian house in Ohio (he was a banker!) and they had a parlor with big wooden pocket doors that she remembered being closed before Christmas to hide the tree and presents – they were not allowed to see before Christmas morning – very old school!

I suppose because of this itinerant life as a child I have always highly valued 'home'. And, I suppose, it is why the story of Mary and Joseph's journey always rang bells for me – going to the hometown (as Bethlehem was for Joseph), and being put up wherever there were beds (or sleeping bags and floor space!).

In my life with Doug it has been so great to have a home together – a place for all our stuff--a place for everything and everything in its place (most of the time!). There is a real contentedness at being at home with those you love and feeling surrounded by good memories, enough food, and safe lodging. [as in the BCP prayer for the evening, p. 833: '...then in Thy mercy, grant us a safe lodging, and a holy rest, and peace at the last'] It's also interesting how easy it is to take that all for granted. How many of us have been in those situations where we just wanted to click our heels

together, a la Dorothy in Oz, and repeat “There’s no place like home”!, and suddenly be transported there!

And yet it is not so for everyone. Sadly, there are those who have no home or those who are between homes. And, there are those who have a house, but for whom it is no longer a home – perhaps because someone was lost this last year, or because of strife, or because they may lose their home because of economic trouble.

For Christians, we say that our ultimate home is in heaven...as one old hymn says,

Jerusalem (meaning a heavenly Jerusalem), my happy home,
When shall I come to thee?
When shall my sorrows have an end?
Thy joys when shall I see?

But our heavenly home is not the only home that matters. Home on earth is important too – it’s just a matter of how we conceive of home and how we go about making home. This longing for home and recognition of it as an important thing is reflected in something Jesus’ said to his disciples:

Matthew 8: Then a scribe came and said to Him, "Teacher, I will follow You wherever You go." Jesus said to him, "The foxes have holes and the birds of

the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head." Another of the disciples said to Him, "Lord, permit me first to go and bury my father." But Jesus said to him, "Follow Me, and allow the dead to bury their own dead."

What a hard saying. He who started his life a homeless baby, still in his adult ministry lived as a homeless person....by choice. Jesus' teaching here is suggesting to his followers that in following him they may not be able to rest at home, that they shouldn't even worry about stopping to bury the dead, that they may not know security in an earthly sense. But I think it is not so much about not burying the dead, or not having a home, as much as it is about his keen desire that people get busy with caring for the living and providing 'home' in a deeper sense.

Jesus warned about the seduction of placing our sense of security in earthly things as in Matthew 6:

"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. *[I know about this line particularly this fall as the 'vermin' have set up an acorn bowling alley in our ceiling!]* But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and

vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

“Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?....But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.”

So, is having a home wrong in some way? Of course not! In Jesus’ birth and Incarnation we are profoundly reminded of God’s love for us in this world; that this world matters. It is really more about what we set our hearts on. In some way as a kid I had it right---‘home’ is wherever my family is that night – it’s not the place or things, it’s the people....and knowing where our true security lies. As in the gospel of John (14:23): “Jesus said, ‘Anyone

who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them.' ”

So I will still love home and love having a home, but I will try as hard as I can to remember where my true home (heart) is and I will strive to build ‘home’ wherever I can. Creating home is, in a sense, our purest vocation as followers of Jesus – extending the hospitality of the love of Christ where all are welcomed, loved, and cared for. We want to follow him in making peace and providing a deeper sense of security by the way we love; and by the way we live out Christ’s love in the world, we welcome people ‘home’. Our country needs this sense of welcome and home, and that all belong more than ever.

We also talk of church in terms of our ‘church home’. So how is church a ‘home’? For any of you who have been through major life trials, you know the grace of having a church home! It is a place where we create extended family and care for one another through deaths and losses, where we celebrate together births and marriages, and Easter, Christmas and the weekly fellowship in Christ – and the weekly sacrament of ‘coffee hour’! And as much as we love our old building, we all know it is not our ‘home’.

For just like the Who's down in Whoville, even if the Grinch came and took our building away, we would still gather on the common, join hands in a big circle, and sing:

Welcome Christmas, fah who rah-moose

Welcome Christmas, dah who dah-moose

Christmas day will always be

Just so long as we have we

So rejoice in your home this Christmas – be grateful for the shelter, the warmth, the family and friends, the tchotchkes, knick-knacks, and old Christmas decorations with all their memories-- but never forget that all that we love about home is also our mission to the world – not holed up with an attitude of 'I've got mine', but with doors and arms flung wide to embrace a hurting world....and wherever we are, remember the startling message of Christmas morning: God has chosen to 'make His home' with us, our Lord, Emmanuel!