

Ephesians 6:10-20  
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“Home”

Rev. William G. Utke  
Emanuel UCC, HC

What comes to mind when you think of Home? Is it a place? A person? Do you find a sense of home within yourself? Is home a memory?

I got a social media update from MacMurray College, my alma mater, located in Jacksonville, IL. The update said, 2 days till “move in Day.” I recalled how, after 18 years of living in my parents’ house, I went away to college and my dorm room became my new “home.” But one day I learned how violated one can feel in their “home.”

The summer after my first year at MacMurray I applied to work as a counselor in a program which brought intellectually gifted 5<sup>th</sup> through 9<sup>th</sup> graders to campus to participate in advanced educational programs, each session lasted two weeks.

That summer our group of counselors came up with a fun way to say goodbye at the end of each session. Students, professors and counselors would gather in Annie Merner Chapel and we would put a microphone up to my jambox stereo. In an age of Bluetooth earbuds and ipods this dates me. Anyway, at the closing ceremony we would play Van Halen’s version of a song by Roy Rogers and Dale Evans called, “Happy Trails.”

Mmmnnnnmmmmmm dup dup mmmnnnnmmmmmm

*Then the chorus would kick in the background ---*

Bom-ba-dee-da-Bom-ba-dee-da

*Then David Lee Roth would sing*

Happy trails to you, Until we meet again,

Happy trails to you, Keep smiling on til then

Who (*a chorus of “Ooo’s” kicked in*) cares about the clouds when we're together

Just (*a chorus of “Ahhh’s began* ) sing a song an' think bout sunny weather

...two...three

*(back to the bom-ba-dee-da’s and Roth would finish)*

Happy trails to you, Til we meet, ba, ba, ba, ba, a--gain!

One week, at the closing ceremony all the youth had been picked up except two from my group. I had to wait at the chapel until their parents arrived, so another counselor asked if he could help by taking my jam box back to the dormitory. I said sure and he told me where he would put it, so I could get it later.

But when I got back to the Dorm, it wasn’t there. I looked for my co-counselor and we went and looked, and it was gone.

When something is stolen we feel violated, scared, unsafe and unsure. We lose that sense of “home.” For months afterward, every time I heard music I wondered if someone was playing my jambox.

There is a hunger in us, a deep yearning to find place to call home. Call it our happy place, our safe haven, one protected from violence and pain and conflict and crime. Maybe it’s a man cave or a she shed, we would love a place protected by the belt of truth, defended by the breastplate of righteousness. We would pay top dollar for a shield of faith and a helmet of salvation to have just once place we could go to be screened away from all suffering, all harm, and all ugliness.

The people of Israel viewed the ancient temple this way. It was God’s home and it was their spiritual home. We understand how devastating it was when, over the centuries, army after army would destroy and defile the temple. The temple in Jerusalem was where the ark of God resided, this ark symbolized the very location from which God’s presence and power were emitted into the world.

When we consider this sanctuary, we are aware of the power held by the images around us, the memories which are evoked, the bells which are rung and the candles which are lit. The space comes alive with inspiration and beauty.

Here in the sanctuary, be it the silence of a Tuesday morning, the meditateness of Christmas eve, the journey with Jesus to the cross, or the celebration of Easter; this is an important place where the stories of our lives meet the truth of the gospel. Here, we can be more vulnerable because we are part of a community seeking to practice God’s love and hope. Here we can try out our gifts instead of being expected to be a professional right away. Some Sundays the preacher or music or liturgy will usher us into God’s presence – but when they don’t, this beautiful edifice itself can lift us into a sense of spiritual awe and wonder. We feel at home. Unfortunately, we continue to hear of times when violence, and abuse, and other violations occur in these sacred places of worship destroying the sense of home.

Today’s passage from the Psalms points people of faith to an important reality... Our real home is in God. We are to dwell in God; Creator, Redeemer, and Comforter. The one who has the power to draw back the waters and assist Israel’s escape from slavery. The one who has carried us over troubled waters and lifted us from the pit. The one who leads the people through the harsh wilderness, delivering them to a promised land. The one who feeds 5000 with little food, heals the blind and bleeding, and calms our stormy waters.

God is our home. Our sanctuary. Buildings, and countries, can be made more secure, but nothing on earth provides perfect security. Our only true home is in God.

We find support for this from the powerful images scripture offers us about home. You may be familiar with some of these; from John’s gospel, “In my Father’s house there are many dwelling places.” Second Corinthians, “For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is

destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands..." Psalm 68, "God gives the desolate a home to live in; God leads out the prisoners to prosperity..." Psalm 126, "Those who go out weeping, bearing the seed for sowing, shall come home with shouts of joy, carrying their sheaves." Psalm 127, "Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain."

There are many more but let me close with a widely beloved image from the 21<sup>st</sup> chapter of the book of Revelation, "... I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them; they will be his peoples, and God will be with them...'"

During my youth there was a Christian publication I read which had a profound impact on the development of my faith and my call to ordained ministry. As a teenager, I had a subscription to a magazine called "Alive Now." Each month this magazine published poems, writings, interviews, prayers and scripture readings under a different theme. I'd like to close with a very short reflection called "Going Home" by Jean Vanier, from one edition of "Alive Now"

"Going Home is a journey to the heart of who we are, a place where we can be ourselves and welcome the reality of our beauty and our pain. From this acceptance of ourselves, we can accept others as they are, and we can see our common humanity."

Amen