

## Home

### Mark 6:1-13

How do you define home? Maybe you think of the phrase, “Home is where the heart is.” Maybe you think of the house you live in now, or the house you grew up in, or a place that gave stability to a childhood that didn’t have much. For poet Robert Frost, “home is the place where, when you have to go there, they have to take you in.”

The people of Israel in the Old Testament are immigrants, travelers, wanderers, who are often away from home. Abraham is called by God to leave his father’s land to travel to a land God has promised him and is described as a wanderer. Abraham’s grandson Jacob goes on a long, rambling journey to escape the anger of his brother Esau after tricking their father to give him the birthright. Joseph doesn’t have much choice in the matter, but is sent down to Egypt after his brothers sell him into slavery; and his brothers follow him later. After Moses leads the people out of Egypt, they wander through the wilderness for forty years. The people of Israel spend a lot of time looking for home, wandering and traveling.

In the New Testament, there’s a lot of wandering away from home. Jesus and his disciples are always traveling from place to place. Study Bibles have maps that show Paul’s missionary journeys that span the Mediterranean Sea, looping from place to place. The author of Hebrews reminds the early Christians that they are strangers and exiles on the earth, wanderers like the people of God before them, without a place to call home.

In a very real sense, though, we’re never really home no matter where we go in life. We may say, “There’s no place like home;” but after the Fall, this world full of sin was never meant to be home. As we just sang, “I’m but a stranger

here. Heaven is my home.” Ultimately, wherever we go on earth it’s just a rest stop, a layover. We know we’re just passing through, looking for home.

Jesus knew the transitory nature of life. As he traveled from town to town, he never had a place of his own. Describing himself, Jesus said, “Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head” (Matthew 8:20). He knew he was a stranger on Earth, and any place that he had here was only temporary. He and his disciples wandered around Galilee, Jerusalem, and Judea, never staying in one place for long. Even though we hear brief mentions of their homes, they don’t stay there.

Jesus has trouble when he tries to go home. While others know him as a teacher and a miracle worker, those in his hometown of Nazareth know him because of his family. They know his mother and brothers and may have even known his father. They know Jesus not as a teacher, but as a worker. Perhaps a carpenter, perhaps some other sort of skilled laborer who knew how to build things. Not someone who could teach them about God. Not a prophet. Not a miracle worker. Certainly not the Son of God.

Jesus faced challenges in his hometown. His mother and brothers didn’t seem to know what to do with him. The rest of the townspeople were skeptical at best, violent at worst. When a visit to Nazareth is recorded in other Gospels, the townspeople try to throw Jesus off of a cliff; they’re so offended by his claims and teachings.

Jesus faced those challenges, though, to give us a home. Jesus gave up everything for you, including earthly comforts like a home, so he could be your savior. He died on the cross for

you, and was laid in a borrowed tomb. He rose from the dead and ascended into heaven to bring you home to meet his dad and be with them forever. He came to fix the effects of sin, and prepare the way for the new heaven and the new earth that will be home like this world was supposed to be home.

Jesus also sent out his disciples to be homeless, or at least housing insecure. They'd left their boats and booths and homes behind to follow Jesus. Now they imitate him, going from home to home, town to town. They are to find homes, places where they are welcomed and treated with hospitality, places where people are open to the message they're sharing, about the coming of the kingdom of God in Jesus. Those homes will only be temporary, as they'll travel to other towns to continue to share the Good News of Jesus.

As we get ready to celebrate our pandemic-delayed 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary, the theme is Home Away from Home, celebrating the way that Memorial has specifically been a home away from home for college students over the years. In campus ministry, students are still wanderers, still on a journey. Like Abraham and his descendants, they've left their homes to travel someplace else, but where they are they think is a temporary resting point on the way to the Promised Land of graduation and gainful employment. Students travel from towns near and small to come together for an education, and then are sent out to share what they've learned. Some return to those small towns, while others brave the challenges of the big city. Many continue to move after graduation, moving from job to job and place to place, advancing and wandering. And some just never leave and make their homes here.

The same holds true even more so for international students. Students come from China and South Korea, India and Indonesia,

South Africa and Ethiopia and Brazil and countries in-between. The best and brightest students of these countries and their families travel to the United States to do further research, to study under experts in their fields, to improve their English skills. They sojourn here, living in Ames for a few months or a few years, before returning to their homelands or heading off to somewhere new with new skills and knowledge, new ideas, and hopefully a new faith.

As we journey through this world looking for home, though, we know that we do not travel alone. The people of Israel were led by a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night as they traveled through the wilderness. We have Jesus, the Word of God, who became flesh and wandered among us without a home. He went out and met the disciples where they had wandered after his crucifixion on the road to Emmaus or on the lakeshore in Galilee. The apostles were sent out on journeys of their own, to wander among different peoples and share the Good News of Jesus with all people, continuing to point people to their true home.

Although we're pilgrims and travelers on the earth, weighted down by all the baggage we carry, we don't give up or lose heart. We have joy in the journey, knowing that Jesus died on the cross, taking away the burden of our sin and bearing the load for us. He came down from heaven to give us life and give us hope—and to point the way to journey's end. We don't know what heaven will be like; but we know that it's where we want to go, because of the one who prepared a place for us. Jesus went without a home on earth so he could give us a home with him forever in heaven. What a wonderful promise.

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