

Home Is Where God Is
Jeremiah 29:1, 4-7, 10-14
Luke 9: 57 – 58
Preached by Dr. Cahill
Babcock Presbyterian Church
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I'm going to start with a true story that could've been ripped from the pages of "Ripley's Believe It or Not."

My godson Jon lives in Brooklyn, New York. He was visiting a friend in Montana. At a party, Jon was talking to a young woman. He asked her if she lived in Montana.

"No," she answered, "I was born and raised in Montana but now I live in New York City."

"Really?" he said, "I live in New York City too."

"Really?" she said. "Where in the city do you live?"

"I live in Brooklyn," he said.

"So do I" she said. "What neighborhood do you live in?"

He said, "I live in Clinton Hill."

"Really?" she said. "So do I."

"Really?" he said. "What street do you live on?"

She told him.

He said, "This is totally weird! We live on the same street. What's your address?"

She told him. You guessed it, strange as it seems, they both live in the same building and her apartment is on the floor above his!

You can't make something like this up. If you saw it in a movie, you'd say it was too far-fetched to be believable.

Conversations like this hardly, if ever happen, but nowadays people pulling up stakes and moving far away from home happens all the time. Sometimes it's because people move to another state or country to start a new job. Other times, people retire and move to Florida or Arizona. Too many times people are forced to move to strange new places because of wars or

natural disasters. Many times, whether moving voluntarily or involuntarily, people get homesick and wish they could go back to where they came from.

In Luke's Gospel, we find the story of a would-be disciple running up to Jesus and gushing, "I will follow you wherever you go." Jesus took his measure of the man and discerned he was making a promise he couldn't keep. Jesus answered saying, "Foxes have holes and birds of the air their nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head."

I can identify with that would be disciple. I'm not someone who can impulsively pull up stakes and move far away. I feel more secure in familiar surroundings with the people I know and love the best.

My mother was the same way. After my father died in 1979, someone convinced her she should move to a smaller house. Reluctantly, she put the house on the market. Then one day she went outside and pulled down the "For Sale" sign. She later told me, "Every time I walk through my front door, I always feel like two loving arms are welcoming me." So she stayed put and enjoyed her beloved home until the day she died.

There's a saying, "Home is where the heart is," but the Bible teaches, "Home is where God is." The sentiment, "Home is where the heart is," comes naturally but believing, "Home is where God is," only comes supernaturally.

God revealed this truth to the prophet Jeremiah, prompting him to send a letter to the Jews, recently uprooted from Jerusalem and forced march to the far away city of Babylon.

The Babylonians conquered Judah in 586 BC. It was the Babylonian policy to exile conquered people far away from their homelands to be assimilated into the Babylonian culture. When the exiled Jews got to Babylon they were welcomed with open arms, given good jobs and the encouragement to live out the Babylonian dream. After two generations of assimilation, the Babylonians anticipated the Jews' would be happy where they landed.

Seeing through the Babylonians' clever policy, the prophet Jeremiah sent a letter from Jerusalem to the exiled Jews in Babylon. In part, this is what he was inspired to write:

"Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: Build houses and live in them: plant gardens and eat what they produce. Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease..." (Jeremiah 29:4-6)

Jeremiah was urging the Jews not to give up. Even though you are far from home, God is still with you! Build your houses, tend your gardens, keep up the birthrate. Most of all, never surrender your core identity as God's chosen people.

By sending these instructions, Jeremiah was assuring the Jews God didn't abandon them. They needed to hear that. At the moment, they were suffering from what we today call, post

traumatic stress syndrome. Their old way of life was destroyed. They were pushed out of the land God promised to Abraham and his descendants. By losing their homeland, their identity as The Chosen People was now in doubt. What's more, the holy temple in Jerusalem, the indelible sign of God's eternal presence was sacked and turned to rubble. The Jews feared the Ark of the Covenant, containing the tablets of the Ten Commandments was either confiscated by the Babylonians as a war trophy, or even worse, lost forever.

Jeremiah paints a picture in bold colors of a people overwhelmed by despair and desperation. Everything they knew and loved was lost. Now they faced the unknown. The future was murky, filled with uncertainties. Only reminders of God's promise to Abraham and later Moses gave them the backbone to persevere.

Jeremiah's task was to reassure them that even being far from home, God was still with them. At the same time God wanted them to accept the consequences of their disobedience. They also had to learn the only way out of the predicament they got themselves into was to reaffirm their commitment to God and live accordingly, even if in unpleasant circumstances.

What lesson can we take from the story? First, we can be as obstinate and oppositional as the Jews when they repeatedly rejected the prophets' pleas to stop their foolishness and return to God. Like them, we think we know better and can go along with the prevailing political and cultural norms without compromising our commitment to Christ and his kingdom. Not until it's too late and our plans fall apart do we finally ask each other, "Oh my God, what have we done?"

The sermon title is, "Home Is Where God Is." Wherever we land, God is already there to rule and guide us into the future. You may find yourself in an untenable environment. You may find yourself living in a neighborhood in a constant state of flux. You may find yourself in a place surrounded by people you just don't want to be around. "Why am I here?" you wonder.

Jesus said, "Foxes have holes and the birds of the air have their nests but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head."

If we can wrap our minds around that saying, life would be less stressful. Something to think about, maybe God wants us where we are at a particular time in our lives, even though we don't want to be there. I'm not saying that's always the case. Sometimes we land where we shouldn't be. Even so, whatever situation we find ourselves in, God has a purpose for us being there.

Perhaps God wants to use us to touch someone's life. Maybe God wants us to be agents of grace, bringing God's justice and peace into a community or organization that's either dysfunctional or even worse, downright corrupt. On the other hand, maybe God wants us where we don't want to be for our own good. Maybe we need to learn lessons in humility or maybe God wants us to learn we're stronger than we think.

Jesus said, "Foxes have holes and the birds of the air have their nests but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head," just after the would-be disciple said to Jesus, "I will follow you wherever you go." What do you say?

Jesus spent his life hiking the roads of the Promised Land, seeking out people needing to be saved from anything in this world keeping them from glorifying God.

What do I mean by glorifying God? Simply this: by our words and actions giving God sole credit when all things work together for good.

On a practical level, not everyone is called to pull up stakes to wander here and there, but we are called to wander into the familiar places we go every day. And by wander, I mean intentionally seeking out and regarding the people around us through the eyes of Christ, as he saw us when he was nailed to the cross.

What did Jesus see? He saw sinners needing forgiveness, the sick and dying waiting for healing and new life, outcasts and untouchables begging to be embraced by welcoming arms.

The cross was the ultimate destination of the man with no place to lay his head. If we were there on Good Friday, chances are we would've looked away from his scarred, broken, bloodied body. But look again! Even though, "he has no beauty or majesty that we should look at him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him," on the deepest level, we see heaven's supreme revelation of the purest love no one has ever experienced before or since.

When Jesus told the would-be disciple, "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have their nests but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head," it was both a warning and the plea. Yes, build your houses, plant your gardens, take wives and have sons and daughters, but don't become overly attached to the things of this world. Instead, claim your core identity as a child of God and however you are called to do so, walk in the footsteps of Jesus.

May God give us the grace to follow him wherever he takes us. But never forget, only then will we realize God through Christ has already made his home in you can you claim the assurance that home is where God already is, living in you, now and forever. Amen.