

“Home”

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Joint service

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I begin today by asking you the question: What is home? How do you define home? Some of you might be thinking ‘a place where I feel safe, a place where I am comfortable, perhaps a place where I experience love and care?’ And yet, as a minister whose focus has been pastoral care and social justice,

I have heard more times than I would like, that home is a place where abuse happens, a home is a place where some have experienced shame and loneliness and depression. Sadly, for some, home is a place of sadness and pain. Yet, again, for others, the home has just been home... uneventful, just a place they go to at the end of the day. What has home been for you?

For me, the concept of home has changed and shifted over time. Growing up in Antigua, home was a wonderful small village, where I had more love than I knew what to do with, with lots of Aunties and Uncles and cousins, who weren’t necessarily blood relatives, but loved and cared for and supported each other like they were. We didn’t have much at all, but we were happy and loved and life was fantastic as kids.

No wonder that, even when I migrated to Canada, whenever I thought of home, I was thinking of that little green house on the hill, with no running water, or electricity, but with lots of happiness and affection within its weathered wooden walls.

But that changed, not even when I got married and bought my first home in London Ontario, but when I had Teala. It was only when she was born that I started to refer to my dwelling place in London as my home. Having a child shifted my understanding of home. Home was now wherever my daughter was.

And now that Teala is graduating high school and is off to college, 'home' is now in transition. Home is now where I can be fulfilled in my personal life and my career and where I can be myself among my friends. You all know that I am returning to London next month, and I am so excited that I get to be closer to my heart friends and my home church. Home for me has truly shifted and changed throughout my life. Has it been the same for any of you?

In our scripture of John today, Jesus is speaking of home, but not in the way we're accustomed to. Jesus is telling his disciples, I read from **John 14: 23**: "If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him." In other words, if they remain true to God, God will come and live with them.

So just some context. The culture of Palestine during this period of history placed a great deal of importance on the home and hospitality. For them, The home was a place of nurture, rest retreat, growth and fellowship. People were given adequate food and drink for their survival and physical health.

They were given a bed on which to rest after a day's work. They were given a place to retreat from the world with all of its endless problems and demands. They were given a place for opportunities for physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual growth and fellowship.

The home was not only a centre for the basic family unit; it was also the centre of hospitality for banquets, study, higher learning and worship. The home, in addition to all of this, was a place of protection and amnesty for foreign travellers, refugees, and outcasts.

Therefore, when Jesus, speaking about the Father and himself, said: "We will come to them and make our home with them," he is making a very wonderful promise. He is promising—through the power of the resurrection—to be present with us; to live with us and provide for our needs; as we journey through this life.

Are you like I am in finding this to be really exciting, that whatever my concept of home is or has been, God is creating a whole new home life with me. This is particularly comforting for those for whom home has not been a happy place. What does look like when God comes to live with you?

You know I serve on the Chaplaincy team at the Mission, along with George who presided with you guys a few weeks ago, Rev Jim Hatt, a young man from the Jewish community named Jonathon Bruneau and Mary-Jo Kovaks, who is the director of Youth Services. A few weeks ago we had a covenanting service for the new executive director RUKSHINI PONNIAH-GOULIN in the dining room at the Mission.

And I noticed a new guest there, so I went over to talk with him afterwards. He was unusually open about his life and his story. He began by telling me that he was a new man. He shared with me that his family migrated from Serbia eight years ago, himself, his wife and three children.

He admitted that he had been a drunk, all his marriage, and was often violent toward his wife when she criticized his drinking and the fact that he often drank away the money they needed within the household. He admitted that he was a monster to his family, both in Serbia and since they moved to Canada.

But he said one night after coming home drunk, he went to hug his youngest daughter and she cringed when he came near. He had just enough clarity to realize that something was very wrong. He went to hug his eleven-year-old son, and he too backed away as if frightened. Dad, in his drunken state, was gaining even more clarity. He called for his eldest child, a daughter but she stayed hidden in her room. What happened next was what sobered him all the way.

His wife went into the room to beckon his daughter to come out, and he heard his wife say to his daughter that she just come out, so that he doesn't become angry and agitated. Because when he's angry and agitated he takes it out on his wife.

He said that everything changed at that moment! He realized that he left Serbia to take his family away from all the violence, but he was the very one who was bringing violence to his family. He said 'I am the one who was the terrorist to my wife and children'.

That night in his drunken state, God showed up to live with this man. And the man decided to take a step back because even as he stopped drinking, he realized that his wife and children are still afraid of him. He said he has left for now so that his family could have some peace. He is hoping that he could prove himself to them so that they could start to trust him. But for now, he thinks it's best to stay away.

But here's the kicker. He is attending AA, he's making strides toward being a better person to himself and his family, and he has told me that he is at peace, he's in the best mental and emotional place he's been in almost all his life. My friends, this is what happens when God comes to live with us, or at least when we realize that God is living with us. Because I think that God already has come to life with you and me, but perhaps we just aren't aware.

And sometimes, just like this man at the mission, who has spent so much of his time terrorizing his family in a drunken stupor, sometimes, the Spirit causes a fire within the home of our souls that burns away our violent tendencies, that chars our addictions, that brings us into soberness, and that fire rearranges the living arrangements of our own spirit, bringing us into an awareness that God has been living with us this whole time.....

What does it feel like when you become aware that God has been living with you? When did you realize that God has moved in? You become kinder, you become more loving toward the people in your lives, and you become more respectful toward yourself and others in your dealing with them. Fairness towards others starts to matter.

When you realize that God has been living with you, you become more at peace with yourself, and as you maneuver through this scary world. You become more hopeful that there will be better days, and Easter's promise

that you too will be brought up and out of the darkness of the tomb starts to make better sense to you.

God coming to live with us provides so much of what we have been seeking through our lives, and what we have been looking for when we envision what home should really be: God's living with us provides security when we start feeling unsafe in this world.

When we start feeling like pandemics and other illnesses are the new norm, we become afraid. We are called to be cautious but not to be afraid. Fear benefits no one. And when God lives with us, unnecessary fear is vanquished, and we begin to feel more secure.

When God lives within us we rest better. We are at peace. We have forgiven those we need to forgive, and we have asked for forgiveness of those whom we have wronged.

John 14 our scripture for today begins with the familiar text: "Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also. Here, Jesus presents the opportunity for us to eventually move in with God, to know that we will always have a home where God lives.

But today we also get to think of a different understanding of home, where it is God who moves in with us. May your hearts and minds be open today, to be host to God, as he seeks a dwelling place in your life, Amen...

Prayers of the people:

Jesus prayed that his followers may all be one. In the power of the Spirit, we join our prayers with his.

O God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, give us grace seriously to lay to heart the great dangers we are in by our unhappy divisions.

Take away all hatred and prejudice, and whatever else may hinder us from godly union and concord; that, as there is but one body and one Spirit, one hope of our calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all, so we may henceforth be all of one heart and of one soul, united in one holy bond of peace, of faith and charity, and may with one mind and one mouth glorify you;

I am the vine and you are the branches.

Live in me as I live in you.

As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you.

Live in me as I live in you.

No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends.

Live in me as I live in you.

You are my friends if you do what I command you; love one another as I have loved you.

We offer our Intercessions for the people of God..

Jesus Christ said to His apostles, 'Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you': If you love me, I will come to you and make my home with you. We open our hearts to be your home, we pray all these in the name of the one who taught us peace... and who taught us the prayer...