

Genesis 12:1-3  
 Psalm 90:1-2  
 Hebrews 11:8-16, 12:1-2

Mother's Day, Sixth Sunday of Easter  
 Midway Presbyterian Church  
 May 14, 2023

## **A Pilgrim of Eternity**

### *Introduction to the Old Testament Lesson*

Our scriptures today are not lectionary lessons for this Sixth Sunday of Easter. Rather are they lessons for Mother's Day and helping us reflect on home and what home can mean for us.

In our Old Testament scripture we hear God's call to Abraham. Listen to these words from Genesis 12:1-3...

### *Introduction to the Psalm*

In our Psalm we hear the introduction to a prayer of Moses on an abiding dwelling place. Listen to these words from Psalm 90:1-2...

### *Introduction to the Epistle*

Our Epistle Lesson today recalls the faith of Abraham in answering God's call to leave his home. Listen to Hebrews 11:8-16 and 12:1-2...

### *Sermon*

Remember Judy Garland as Dorothy in the 1939 musical *The Wizard of Oz*? She and her dog Toto were whisked away from their home in Kansas by a tornado and wound up in the colorful Land of Oz. There are Munchkins, witches, and a yellow brick road. Remember how Dorothy met Scarecrow who was looking for a brain, Tin Man who needed a heart, and the Cowardly Lion who lacked courage?

Well, the five have many adventures searching for the Wizard in hopes that he would give them the things they needed, including help for Dorothy get back home to Auntie Em and Uncle Henry. However, Toto exposes the Wizard as a fake. Yet he grants their wishes by giving the Scarecrow a diploma, the Tin Man a heart-shaped clock which ticked like a heart, and the

Lion a medal, enough to convince them that they had found what they were seeking. He then offers to carry Dorothy home in his hot air balloon, but Toto chases after a cat and they miss their ride. That's when Glinda, the Good Witch of the North, steps up and tells Dorothy that she has had the power to go home all along. All she has to do is to click the heels of her ruby slippers together three times and repeat, "There's no place like home. There's no place like home."

Sue Anne Morrow, a counselor at Princeton University, said that if asked what was the single thing that more than anything else brought students to her office, she would have to answer "home." Many students came to her surprised and a little embarrassed to be homesick, lonely for their little brother, their grandmother, their parents, their own room. One student said, "when I'm here, I long for home, but when I am home, I want to come back." There is no place like home. But for some it sounds like there is no place that really is home.

Where is home for you, and what feeling does the word *home* evoke for you? What first comes to mind when you think of home? I know some of our members have lived in the same place for more than half a century.

My first nine years I grew up on Rose Street, not far from downtown Jackson, Mississippi. I had an older sister, Ann, and a younger sister, Nadine. We walked to Central Presbyterian Church and Poindexter Elementary School. At the beginning of fourth grade, we moved to a new home on Terrace Avenue in a neighborhood just outside the city limits of Jackson. Woods and a lake were within easy walking distance. I picked blackberries and my mother made that wonderful cobbler. My father, who was a store clerk for United Gas Pipeline Company, used to take me to "the country,"—this was a piece of land near Magee, some 40 miles south of Jackson. There was fishing, hunting, and making tree houses. Baseball, basketball, football, and track.

While I knew many joys in those first two homes, I have to acknowledge that there are also some painful memories of sickness, surgery, failure, disappointment.

In our nearly 56 years of marriage, Hazel and I can count twelve different homes. We've raised four children, experienced an empty nest for a brief time, and tended to my mother in our home during the last four years of her life. But in each place we have tried to build a home, and bloom where we were planted.

In Frederick Buechner's book, *The Longing for Home* (which is in our church library), he talks about the meaning of home being twofold: the home we remember and the home we dream. He says that as a word, "home" not only recalls the place that we grew up in and that had much to do with the people we eventually became, but also points ahead to the home that we believe awaits us at life's end.

On this Mother's Day, 2023, the thought of home can leave us with a great longing. As people of faith, what can we offer as a response to this longing for home? That matter is what this sermon seeks to address. And in so doing I want to suggest three things: first, home is a journey, a pilgrimage if you will; second, homemaking is a vocation for us all; and third, the Christian community of the church can be a foretaste of our eternal home.

In our scripture this morning from Genesis 12, we find God calling Abraham, who was not a young man, to go from his country, his kindred, and his father's house, and to set forth on a *journey* to a promised land—which is not presently revealed. The call of God to Abraham was for the purpose of creating a great nation, blessing Abraham, and through him blessing all the families of the earth. And Abraham said yes to God's call.

But undoubtedly, he had his wistful moments in which he wondered why he had come to Canaan. He was seeking that Promised Land, but often the land seemed more full of trials and tribulations than of milk and honey. And none of the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, or Jacob, was

able to enter into full possession of the land. They lived in tents, and tents were designed to be moved.

All of these died in faith without having received the promises, but from a distance they saw and greeted them. They confessed that they were strangers and foreigners on the earth, for people who speak in this way make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. (Hebrews 11:13-14)

The children of Israel, when they were wandering in the wilderness, would at times gladly have gone home, back to the bondage in Egypt, where at least they had food to eat. We too know that desire to turn back, to go back to what we think of as a simpler, more hopeful, more enjoyable time. We know that yearning as individuals, as a church, as citizens of the United States.

In Thomas Wolfe's *You Can't Go Home Again*, the main character, George Webber, comes to realize:

You can't go back home to your family, back home to your childhood...back home to a young man's dreams of glory and of fame...back home to the places in the country...back home to the old forms and systems of things which once seemed everlasting but which are changing all the time—back home to the escapes of Time and Memory.

In the Letter to the Hebrews it is clear that the Old Testament heroes of faith were seeking a homeland, a better country, a heavenly one. So they accepted the pilgrim life. It was not that these biblical examples detached themselves from the life and work of this world, but they remembered that they were “on the way.” And as followers of Christ, we affirm that we are not stuck in the past, or the present. We're on a sacred journey, accompanied by the Holy Spirit. We are followers of the One who is the way, the truth, and the life. We can see the world as a bridge to our eternal home in heaven and regard ourselves as “A Pilgrim of Eternity.”

So first—the pilgrim perspective of a journey. Now then secondly, the vocation of homemaking.

Irene Dunne starred in the 1948 movie, *I Remember Mama*. A heartwarming story of family life in San Francisco in 1910 (the year my father was born). Mama is Marta Hanson, a Norwegian immigrant, who carefully prepares the weekly budget with her husband and four children, so that they won't have to go to the bank and take from their savings account. Each family member has to sacrifice in order that the son, Nels, can go to high school. And together they make a home.

But I believe God asks us to stretch our understanding of home beyond a longing for a place to a vision that is God's own. Making homes for others, sheltering the homeless and the mentally ill, feeding those who are hungry, tucking in those who have been abandoned, restoring those who have been abused. Jesus said when you do these things, it's the same as doing them to him. (Mt. 25:35-40)

To seek a better country, a heavenly one, is to build habitats for humanity. It's to extend a helping hand to Thornwell Home for Children in Clinton, Calvary Home in Anderson, and the Shalom House in Belton. It's to provide through our Mother's Day Offering for the residents of our Presbyterian Communities, who can no longer pay the full cost, so that they won't have to leave their home. One way God fills the empty space between our longing for home and the reality of home's limitations is to give us the vocation of homemaking.

Pilgrims, homemakers, and finally, creators of a Christian community—a church—that is a foretaste of our eternal home. Where God will wipe away every tear. Where suffering and death will be no more. It is here in this community of the church that people can hear the call and find the inspiration to be pilgrims, homemakers, and just as importantly—to feel ourselves eternally at home in God's truth and love. We seek to create a church that is a place where we can join with the psalmist in declaring that the Lord is ever our abiding place. (90:1-2) A place

where we can bring our burdens and yearnings, the dismay we sometimes feel, the guilt we have known, the grief we have experienced; as well as our faith, our hope, and our love.

In his book *Nearing Home* (which is also in our church library) Billy Graham says of our final home:

It has been a great privilege for me to be an evangelist; my greatest joy has come from seeing people all over the world respond to the life-changing message of Jesus Christ. But on a personal level it has had its downside because I was away from home so much, sometimes for months at a time. But no matter how short or long the trip was, when I landed in Charlotte or Asheville, I knew I was nearing home. Home was a place of rest and peace; it also was a place of love and security.

In a far greater way, Heaven is our home—our final home—our ultimate place of complete peace and security and joy forever. Here our homes are imperfect, even at best; sadly, for many people home may actually be a place of conflict and unhappiness. But this isn't true of Heaven. When we belong to Christ, we know that when we die we finally will be at peace—for we will be home. (pp. 178-179)

At a Baptismal Font like this one, we are welcomed into the Christian community even before we can say thank you. And in this Christian community we gather around this Communion Table for the great feast where we know forgiveness, renewal, and purpose. We know God's blessing and we know ourselves as God's children. We know that we're part of the Communion of Saints—all God's people, in heaven and on earth.

Pilgrims who sometimes feel as strangers in a foreign land, yet seek a better country, a heavenly one, not only for ourselves, but for others; homemakers who make a career out of building homes for all God's children; and finally members of the Body of Christ who create a community that hopefully seems a lot like the home we have been longing for, and a foretaste of that eternal home that Christ has prepared for us, in that bright land where we'll never grow old.

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.