

FINDING HOME IN THE SOJOURN

John 13:1-5; 15:1-5

Sermon by Mag Richer Smith

May 6, 2018

13 Now before the festival of the Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. ²The devil had already put it into the heart of Judas son of Simon Iscariot to betray him. And during supper ³Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, ⁴got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. ⁵Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him.

15 I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine-grower. ²He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit. ³You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you. ⁴Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. ⁵I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing.

In July of 2015, Bob and I put our belongings into a **storage unit** and left Iowa City, anticipating that we would be **homeless** for a maximum of **5 months**.

Well, we were wrong. It has been **almost 3 years** of living out of **a suitcase** and being very **dependent** on the next **generous offer of housing** that could *provide* **pots and pans and towels and bedding**.

And after 15 temporary moves, we can say,

“THANKS BE TO GOD...for the **astounding, miraculous** provision of place after place.

And the **learnings** have been immense...

The **unencumbered space** of NOT having THINGS to care for has brought **freedom of movement** and **lightness**,

creating **more time** & freeing up **more energy** for **relationships**.

We *have missed* very **few** of our THINGS.

Oh, sometimes I wish for **an outfit** I left behind or a **photo** I'd like to share or my **popcorn popper** and other **cooking utensils**.

Sometimes I wish I had those **file drawers of old sermons** or my **Biblical commentaries**.

But mostly, I have learned it's **not** "STUFF- R- US"...

That is, unless **my focus** takes me to this **new little house** we have been building ...

And here's **the rub**...

How **easy** it has been to **get lost** in the **details** and to **wander away** from what matters!

I know now what it's like to spend **sleepless hours** concerned about **light fixtures and doorknobs**.

How **easy** it has been to **get kidnapped** by all the **options the internet** offers for **shower curtains** and everything else!

(OH LORD, have mercy!)

So as Bob and I *anticipate* a **reunion this week** with our earthly belongings, it is not without some **trepidation**.

We have had enough these past years.

What are we going to do with a **whole truckload** of **MORE?**

What **role** will **things** and a **house** play in our journey?

And how can we (or will we) be **centered** in the HOME that is ETERNAL...

in **Jesus**, who invites us all to **ABIDE WITH~ LIVE WITH~ STAY connected to** and find our **SUSTENANCE in him**...

And in so doing **bear the kind of fruit** that will **last** long **after our sojourn** on earth is over?

Bob and I are frequently asked now:

**“Are you going to MAKE GOSHEN your
PERMANENT HOME?”**

And SOMETHING INSIDE reacts and says **“NO!”**

It's that word....**“PERMANENT”**...that is the **STICKLER**,
because (as my dad would often say, quoting his favorite verse
from Hebrews),

“There is no continuing city here.”

Our **BREATH** is a SEASONAL PRIVILEGE.

OUR JOURNEY HERE on earth is brief and TEMPORARY.

Mary Oliver says,

“I am like a single day that passes.”

“Permanence” is only in the Creator's on-going **LOVE** and in our
forever HOME IN GOD.

Jesus is **GROUND**ED in his **forever-home.**

Here we are in this familiar scene in John's Gospel...

It's just before the Passover.

Jesus is quite aware that his own **departure is imminent.**

But his focus is on the **tremendous love** he has for his **own...**

including the **Betraying Judas,**

the **Denying, Peter,**

and his **closest friends** who are all about to **desert** him
in his **most needed hour.**

Here they are at the table, eating dinner together.

and Jesus is **CENTERED & thoroughly at HOME...**

Where is **HOME** for this one

who was *born* in an **animal stable**

and spent his early years as a **refugee**
and now has **nowhere to lay his head...**
Where is HOME?

For Jesus it is in knowing that he **has come from God** and is
returning to GOD.

He has come **from LOVE** and is **returning to LOVE.**

This perspective will also give **our sojourn** here on earth
grounding, meaning and purpose.

When HOME is in the ONE whose name is LOVE...
then we are **FREE, LIBERATED, Un-encumbered...**
(even as we carry one another's burdens).

Knowing **Who we are and Whose we are,**
~ where we have **come from and where we are heading~** gives
us a **sense of HOME**, no matter where we journey. Everywhere
we go the Source of LOVE is **already there, waiting** to
accompany us.

Richard Rohr in his book FALLING UPWARD says,
“When you get your **‘Who am I’** question right,
then all your **‘WHAT SHOULD I DO?’** tend to take care of
themselves.” (We will know when we need to know.)

And I remember Rohr challenging us to ask questions like:
Who were you before your **current vocation,**
your **role,** your **education?**
And who were you before **all your life experiences?**
And who were you before you were **Orville and Velma’s**
daughter or **Alfred and Esther’s son?**

I have spent **enough hours** with **small children** in the last 3 years to be **reminded anew** that in the very young there is a **Purity of heart** that knows a **belonging in God**.

Rohr recalls **a story** he overheard between **very young siblings** and the older one asked the younger,
“Can you tell me again where I came from before I forget?”

Young children come into the world carrying the **mystery of the ETERNAL**, in touch with **having already** been held in the **bosom of the Creator**.

And nothing **comforts** the little children whom I know best (when they are restless) more than singing, **“Jesus loves me”**
 Deep inside, they know that **“YES,”** and it is HOME.

Jesus knows that he has **come from God** and is heading **back to God**.

And actually where we **have come from**
 may not be as important as **where we are going...**
Are our life choices *taking us* where we **want to be?**

We live with **few certainties...** There are no guarantees that **tornadoes or floods**, or **accidents or illness** will not **threaten** our well being, or that we will **see another day**.

But is there not a **deeper place** where (in spite of the world's woes) we can know that **all will be well and all will be well and all manner of things will be well**, because **LOVE is LORD** of heaven and earth?

Barbara Brown Taylor says,

“Once we have chosen our destination as God-centered, our destination chooses us.

We have **citizenship** ceremonies called **Baptism**, and then we get a **whole new crowd** of **coaches** and **cheerleaders** who are **dedicated to helping us grow** and **getting us to where we mean to go**,

-not just by the end of time,
but by the end of every single day.”

Doesn't **HOME** mean that we do not need to ask WHY we are here or WHAT we are for.

Because, like Jesus, we know **where we have come from and where we are headed?** We are headed toward **full communion with God and neighbor**,

away from **despair**,

toward **justice and peace** for all,

away from anything that might persuade us to **respect the dignity of just some** human beings, but **NOT all**.

So here is Jesus at HOME in his identity as BELOVED, and what does he DO?

HE takes off the **OUTER** garment...

That **heavy, cumbersome** winter coat,
(All that might weigh him and us down).

He lets go of **attachments** to earthly THINGS and to all **concerns** about being **good enough**.

He let's go of **anxieties** about **door-knobs & light fixtures** and the need to make **perfect choices** or be **perfect parents**.

He removes the **heavy “SHOULD’S”**
and all the **pseudo-needs** for **approval & success** and becomes
nakedly vulnerable with **just a towel** around his waist...

A TOWEL of **compassion** that will let each person, each
situation, and each dirty foot **give it shape...**

A towel of **grace and forgiveness...**

A **pliable towel** that (unlike a tightly-held fist) opens in **loving
invitation...**

Jesus clothes his nakedness with only **THIS** towel and says,

**“All you need is a vulnerable love that acknowledges our
common need for being cleansed and beginning again.”**

He **pours water** and **stoops down** and **washes his disciples’ feet,**
saying,

**“ I know how you struggle to stay HOME and remain Grounded
and Centered.**

I know you will wander and be kidnapped again.

***I know you may participate in betrayals
and desert those who need you most.***

I know you may lie and change your story many times...

But I am offering you **a taste of Home,**
of the **LOVE that created you, & cleanses you**
and **wants to hold you forever.**

I am washing the dirt off your feet in order to assure you that
‘**NO one** (and **no part of YOU**) is beyond the reach of **divine
love...**despite society’s way of stating the opposite.’”

Washing feet is about **compassion and forgiveness** that the
world does not understand.

IT is a **freely-offered RECONCILIATION**

“Betraying Judas, I love you.

Lying Peter, you are mine.

Sleeping and Wandering FRIENDS,

I *forgive* your *forgetfulness*

And *offer you* *homecoming.*”

Jesus **removes** the OUTER garment
stoops down and **becomes** vulnerable
holding our **dirty feet** in his hands,
inviting us in our weary pursuits to **“COME HOME”...**

And asking us to **abide in him,**
 as he is **so committed** to **abiding** in us...
 and **“bear fruit,”** he says that will last **long after** your **temporary**
sojourn on this earth.

My Central American friend told me about the **old man** who
 was planting an Avacado seed, and how the people passing
 by were *laughing* because this **foolish man** would **never live** to
see this tree mature or enjoy its fruit.
 But the old man calmly told them that **life is not all about him**
now, but about **all** who **will come after** him and one day enjoy
 the shade of this tree and pick these avocados.

As Joe Liechty once said (in an address to Goshen College
 graduates) about maturity:

Plant the seeds.

Let them go, Need no credit

Never know the outcome,

and do it all as an offering of praise and gratitude.

This is what it looks like to **dwell IN JESUS...**

Let ourselves be available **to plant the seeds**
and trust the LOVE that WILL **bear fruit.**

As Jesus **stoops before his little community of friends,**
he offers them his **vulnerable self-giving love**
and a **new beginning,** and **invites them** to

“Offer one another what I have offered you” ...

**Simple and fragile acts of hospitality and compassion that
create new opportunities to connect.**

In all the **conflictual messes** of our world and of our **muddy
relationships,** the invitation is to remember that
we have **come from LOVE** and are **returning to LOVE...**
And that is enough to center us in this brief sojourn on earth.

HOME is not found in any of our houses or shelters.

Life is not about creating a **special name for ourselves,**
But about what Palmer Becker calls our 3 core values:

Letting **Jesus** be the CENTER OF OUR FAITH.

Letting **Community** be the CENTER OF OUR LIVES.

And making **Reconciliation** the CENTER OF OUR WORK.