

Message: It’s About Home

Christmas and thoughts of home just go together in the U. S.

“I’ll be Home for Christmas,” and “There’s No Place Like Home for the Holidays,” are two of the most popular holiday songs, year after year. Movies and television shows regularly feature stories of people going to their family home or the home of their extended family for Christmas.

It’s all about home.

What is home? What does it mean to come home? It’s different for each of us. Some find home with their relatives or extended family and established traditions. For example, we may light candles and having a time of family prayer during Advent, or decorate a Christmas tree, or go caroling through a neighborhood, or host a party for friends, neighbors, and colleagues. Those are some ways we try to create that sense of home, of belonging. Some find home with the person they love the most. Patients in long-term care may be in a place and time where home exists only in deep corridors of their memories.

Finding a place to call home may seem more distant, and yet more critical, than ever before, given the challenges around the globe - destruction from hurricanes, typhoons, earthquakes, fires, tornadoes, droughts, politics, prejudice and wars. There is little peace, great oppression and great injustice in the world today.

In this week’s reading from Isaiah 40, God turns back toward God’s people. God restores the fortunes of the community. God is merciful and offers pardon for sin. God speaks peace to the faithful, to those who turn to the Lord in their hearts. In other words, God has returned to be at home among mortals.

What is home?

Perhaps home is simply wherever we meet. It’s where we intersect. I believe home is where the paths of our lives come into contact with the lives of others and with our Savior. As the Psalmist says, home is the place where steadfast love and faithfulness meet. It’s the place where righteousness and peace connect.

Home is where we meet.

Home is anywhere we meet God, face-to-face and hand-in-hand.

Home is the assurance Christ died for us while we were yet sinners, proving God’s love for us. Home is knowing we’re saved by the grace of God. Home is finding comfort in Jesus’ love. Home is being accepted just as you are. Home is anywhere we meet God’s people and welcome them in with the love of Christ.

Welcome home! We’re glad you are here. Come in, sit down and stay a while. Let’s meet Jesus.

Let us pray...

Gracious God, we come to you as your children, made in your image. We need your grace and mercy, yet we struggle to get past our own interests. Fill us with a spirit of love. Free us from the tyranny of the urgent, show us how to find silence. Give us the courage to turn away from prejudicial and unjust attitudes and behaviors, embracing the new way of life you give. Show us how to truly follow you, no matter what it may cost, so that we may live and care for others in your name. Amen.

Isaiah 40:1-11 (CEB)

“Comfort, comfort my people!”, says your God.

Speak compassionately to Jerusalem, and proclaim to her that her compulsory service has ended, that her penalty has been paid, that she has received from the LORD’s hand double for all her sins!

A voice is crying out: “Clear the LORD’s way in the desert! Make a level highway in the wilderness for our God! Every valley will be raised up, and every mountain and hill will be flattened. Uneven ground will become level, and rough terrain a valley plain. The LORD’s glory will appear, and all humanity will see it together; the LORD’s mouth has commanded it.”

A voice was saying: “Call out!” And another said, “What should I call out?” All flesh is grass; all its loyalty is like the flowers of the field. The grass dries up and the flower withers when the LORD’s breath blows on it. Surely the people are grass. The grass dries up; the flower withers, but our God’s word will exist forever.

Go up on a high mountain, messenger Zion! Raise your voice and shout, messenger Jerusalem! Raise it; don’t be afraid; say to the cities of Judah, “Here is your God!” Here is the LORD God, coming with strength, with a triumphant arm, bringing his reward with him and his payment before him. Like a shepherd, God will tend the flock; he will gather lambs in his arms and lift them onto his lap. He will gently guide the nursing ewes.

Mark 1:1-8 (CEB)

The beginning of the good news about Jesus Christ, God’s Son, happened just as it was written about in the prophecy of Isaiah:

*Look, I am sending my messenger before you.
He will prepare your way,
a voice shouting in the wilderness:
“Prepare the way for the Lord;
make his paths straight.”*

John the Baptist was in the wilderness calling for people to be baptized to show that they were changing their hearts and lives and wanted God to forgive their sins. Everyone in Judea and all the people of Jerusalem went out to the Jordan River and were being baptized by John as they confessed their sins. John wore clothes made of camel’s hair, with a leather belt around his waist. He ate locusts and wild honey. He announced, “One stronger than I am is coming after me. I’m not even worthy to bend over and loosen the strap of his sandals. I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”