

Our Heart's True Home

(Play “Won’t You Be My Neighbor” from Mr, Roger’s Neighborhood. Dan will come out and put on a zippered sweater and change into sneakers.)

How many of you recognize that music? How many of you grew up in Mr. Roger’s neighborhood? One of the reasons Mr. Rogers was so popular– across generations, across racial, economic, and political divides– was his ability to make everyone feel at home. It didn’t matter who you were, Mr. Rogers welcomed you home. When you watched his show as a kid, you weren’t just friends, or boys and girls, you were neighbors.

And if someone were to ask, “Who is my neighbor?” Fred Rogers, who was an ordained Christian minister by the way, would reply in much the same way as Jesus did in the parable of the Good Samaritan – Anyone.

We want to welcome you home this morning. You’re not just friends. You’re not just ladies and gentlemen. You’re not even just neighbors. You’re family. You’re brothers and sisters, and we want to welcome you home. Easter is a time family gets together. Especially, after a year like we’ve had. We need together more than ever.

Most of us have a place we call home, a place where we feel at home. It’s not just your home address. It’s home. Sometimes, home isn’t even where you live. Most of us have been through a season where home is somewhere else. Maybe home was grandma’s house. Your parents went through a trying time, so you went to stay with your grandparents.

Or how about when you go to college? You go off to school, but home...is still home. I remember when I was in college, and you’d try to make plans with friends for a weekend, or I’d ask a girl out on a date, and they might say, “I can’t that weekend. I’m going...home.” We all lived at college, but home was somewhere else.

What Makes Home Home – Place?

What is it that makes home, home? Is home a place? Is it the town where you got your favorite ice cream cones, where you cruised on Friday nights, the place that fills your memories? Is home a particular house, on a particular street, in a particular town? The place where you can kick back, crack open a cold one, and watch your favorite team? The place where you know where every pot and every pan, every wooden spoon, and you have every spice for every favorite recipe? The place where your meals are legendary, the backdrops of every great family memory? Is that home?

What Makes Home Home – Things?

Or is home in the stuff, your favorite things that fill that place? The things you are sure to take with you when you move to a new place. Is home is defined by the things that define you? Your posters on the walls, your music coming out of the speakers, your books on the shelves. Your man cave with all your mementos and memorabilia. The signed football sits in a case over there. The game worn jersey hangs on the wall there. Your favorite album covers on that wall, and over

there the biggest deer you ever shot, the biggest fish you ever caught, and then, of course, is the chair.

Your home is filled with things that are a reflection of you. Family heirlooms handed down through generations, antiques picked at countless sales, collections of knick knacks and doodads gathered over the years, things that reflect your sense of style. Your life story is told in those things. You ever walked into somebody's home for the first time and you say, "This is definitely Susie's place." Or maybe you learn something new about someone you thought you knew. "Wow, I never expected Rob's place to look like this." This all comes from the things that fill our homes.

What Makes Home Home – People?

All of those things are important and they are a part of the picture, but I think for most of us home is more than the place. It is more than the stuff. Home is in the people. The sound of footsteps that come running whenever you walk through the door? The laughter that you'd recognize anywhere. It's the voice that greets you. It's the face that smiles at you. The lips that kiss you. Home is the people who listen to your stories. They laugh at your jokes, and they tell you when you're being an idiot, but they love you anyway. These are the people that simply fit you like a favorite pair of jeans. You've just worn each other in. And sometimes they are the people that break your heart. They make you cry like no one else can. That's home.

Over the years, Teresa and I have lived in 6 states, in 4 church parsonages, 1 apartment, and 4 houses of our own. And one thing I know is that home is wherever she is. Home is where we're together. When we moved to Oklahoma, Teresa was finishing up her business degree at Milliken University in Decatur, IL, but I had to go ahead and start my ministry in Grove. For several weeks she stayed in a friend's garage apartment while I was living in the house down in Oklahoma. It was just a house until she got there. That's when it became home.

We want to talk about home this morning. In fact, we're going to be talking about home for the next few weeks in this series we're calling "Welcome Home." We want to welcome home those who've been away for a while, and remind everyone why this is home.

Home is more than just a shelter for your body; it is a refuge for your heart. I want to talk about your heart's true home— that place where your soul can find rest and peace and belonging and security.

What Makes God Feel at Home?

But first I want to flip the question. Let's come at it from a different direction. What makes God feel at home? Have you ever wondered where God feels at home?

When God has thoughts of home, what does he think of? Does he think of a heavenly throne room? Does he think of thousands and thousands of angels? Does he think of golden streets and a city bejeweled in precious stones?

We are definitely made in the image of God when it comes to our thoughts of home. For God,

home is more than a place. Home is more than the things. Home is all about the people. Here's what you need to understand this morning? When God thinks of home, he thinks of you. I don't mean this in some sort of flippant, disrespectful way, and I don't mean it in some sort of arrogant, ego-centric, it's all about you sort of way. I mean it in terms of relationship.

God's Heart Has Always Been to Dwell With His People

It has always been God's desire to dwell with his people. His heart is with his people. God creates Man and Woman and puts them in the Garden of Eden as a paradise where they can dwell in perfect fellowship with God, and be at home with him. Adam was created on the 6th day. His first full day in the Garden is the 7th day, and do you remember what God did on that day. He rested. The seventh day was a Sabbath, a Shabbat, a means rest. Man's first full day on earth in the Garden was day of rest and fellowship with God.

But we lost our first home with God when Adam and Eve were deceived by the serpent to question the goodness and truthfulness of God. They were unfaithful to the God who made them and loved them.

In Exodus 29, after God has called the Children of Israel out of Egypt and he sets them apart at Mt. Sinai, he tells them this:

I will dwell among the people of Israel and will be their God. 46 And they shall know that I am the Lord their God, who brought them out of the land of Egypt that I might dwell among them. I am the Lord their God. –Exodus 29:45-46

The whole point of God calling one nation out of all the nations was so that God could have a family with whom he could be at home. The word dwell that's used here has to do with where you set up your tent. This is where you make your home. Remember, at this time they were a nomadic people. They lived in tents, and God is saying, "I want to pitch my tent with you. I want to live with you. I want to be home with you."

And that's exactly what God did. He pitched his tent right in the middle of their camp. **Look at this diagram of how the Israelite camp was arranged according to Numbers 2.** Where is God's tent, the tabernacle? It's right in the middle of the people. And God tells them, "I'm your God, and you are my people. My family. My home.

This was the whole point of the temple later – to make a dwelling place for God. In Psalm 132:14 speaking of the temple, God says this, "*I will live here, for this is the home I desired (NLT).*"

The problem was Israel wanted to keep making their home with someone else. Their hearts kept chasing after other gods. This is why the OT prophets so often used the language of sexual unfaithfulness to describe Israel's idol worship. They wouldn't keep their devotion at home with God. Instead you would find them in the temples, the homes, of other gods.

But this whole time, you know what God's heart was? You know what God's desire was? To be at home with his people.

Jesus Came So God Could Dwell With Us

Even as the prophet Isaiah promised the destruction of the temple by Babylon, God has Isaiah foretell the birth of child who will be called *Immanuel*. I know it's Easter, but think back to Christmas for a moment. What does Immanuel mean? God with . . . us. God's desire is still to be with us.

This idea of God coming to dwell with us becomes the vocabulary the Apostle John uses to describe the coming of Jesus. John 1:14 says of Jesus, "*And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.*" That word dwelt literally means to pitch his tent. Jesus, the Son God, came from the Father, and made his home with us. Here God is once again making his home with his people, and this time he is doing it in the flesh.

Later on, Jesus makes this point even more clearly in John 14:23. He says, "*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.*" Understand what Jesus is saying here. He doesn't just want to live across town, or be your next door neighbor. He wants to make his home with you.

It becomes all the more intimate and personal when God sends the Holy Spirit. No longer is God just walking with us, listening to us, living with us; he lives in us. The Spirit of God dwells within you. Your life becomes the very home of God.

Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 6:19, "*Do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you.*" You become the temple, the dwelling place, the home where God lives. He makes you his home.

To the Galatians Paul says this about the indwelling Spirit, "*God has sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying out Abba, Father.*" Abba is a very intimate term. This is what a child calls their father. It's like Daddy. He's not the old man upstairs. He not some heavenly Father far and distant. He is our daddy father, who sent his Spirit to live in us. This is the language of family. This is the language of home.

Jesus Conquered Death So We Could Dwell With Him

So, here we are four pages into this sermon and I haven't even talked about Easter yet. What does any of this have to do with the death and resurrection of Jesus? What does this have to do with Easter?

In John 14, as a part of what we know as the Last Supper, the last time of teaching Jesus would share with his disciples before his arrest and crucifixion, Jesus tries to prepare his disciples for his departure, and he gives them this promise. John 14:1-2 says,

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.

Two things. Let's talk about the many rooms for a moment. Those of you who grew up in church decades ago and grew up with the old King James learned this verse as "In my Father's house are many mansions." I remember when I got to Bible College and learned that the original Greek does mean rooms, I was a little disappointed. "Wait, I don't just want a room. I want a mansion." I pictured heaven as this great suburbia in the sky and we'd all get our own McMansion.

But this completely misses the family nature of what Jesus is saying. **Let's walk through the front door of a typical first century Jewish home.** It is a mudbrick house built on a stone foundation, As we walk through the wooden front door, we find a large room subdivided by wooden pillars. To one side is the pen for your animals. We're talking goats, donkeys, sheep, and yes they lived under the same roof with you. There is no Yankee candle that takes away that smell.

On the other side is a work and storage area. This is where all the clay pots, tools and utensils are kept. In the middle is the central courtyard. It would commonly contain a fire pit and a cistern for water. Along the back is the long room. This was the family living quarters. This is where everyone slept. The only privacy was from hanging fabric or hides.

Outside, there would also be a staircase up to a flat roof. This flat roof provided additional work and living space when the weather was mild.

As the family grew and children grew up and got married additional rooms could be added on or around this original structure. In ancient Israel, a large family could have a home with many rooms that have been built around a central area.

(Advance Slide) This is the picture Jesus is sharing in John 14. He's telling the disciples, and he's telling us that you are family. You are brothers and sisters, and I am going back to my Father's house, to add more rooms so that you can have a dwelling place, a home in my Father's house. You will be a part of the family.

Here's what we have – God's heart was to dwell with his people, to be at home with his people. God literally put his tent in the middle to be with them. God sent his Son to dwell in our midst, and his Son, Jesus gave his life, so that one day we could go and dwell with him. God made his home with us, so that in eternity, we could be home with him.

Christmas is all about God making his home with us. Easter is all about God making a home for us. Christmas is all about God dwelling with us. Easter is all about our dwelling with God. Jesus conquered death, so we could dwell with him. The Bible ends with this very point. Revelation 21:3 says,

And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God.'

(Advance Slide) We'll be family. This is what God thinks of when he thinks of home. This tells us where our heart's true home is. Home is an expression of our heart's deepest desires. We all

have many desires. I want that chocolate chip cookie. I want a drink. I want to lose 10 pounds. I want a day off. I want to have sex. Now, these superficial desires can distract, deceive, and even dominate us, but beneath all of these desires we have our true, core longings. These are our heart's deepest needs.

There is the longing for love— to be loved by someone who knows us fully and gives themselves completely. There is the longing for purpose, to know why we're here. There is the longing for understanding – to have someone who gets us and knows us all the way down. There is the longing for security – to feel safe and protected by a strong defender. There is the longing for significance – to know that our existence matters beyond just existing. There is the longing for belonging – to find a relationship with someone who doesn't just accept us, but wants us.

These core longings find their expression in the best of what home can be.

I believe deep in every human heart there is something that longs for home. Even if we've never had that kind of place, even if we've never had that kind of family, we still crave it. We still need it. We may not know where to find it, how to live it, or how to keep it if we ever did, but oh do we want it. We want to belong. We want to be wanted. We want to be loved. We want to be home.

These deepest desires find their satisfaction in God. He is your heart's true home. Home is more than a someplace. Home is more than a something. Home is a someone, and that someone is your Creator and Savior.

Jesus is God's invitation to your heart's true home. Jesus is God's way of saying "This is where you belong." Jesus is God saying, "Come home."

When it comes to your heart; when it comes to your soul, home is not a where. Home is not a what. It's a who. Jesus is your heart's true home. Your soul will be restless until it finds its rest in God.