

There's no Place Like Home

Easter 5A John 14:1-14 & Affirmation of Baptism

(Don't reveal the first slide here)

There is a lot to be learned from Dorothy. You, know...Dorothy -

Slide: Dorothy Gale

Dorothy Gale, from Kansas. This Dorothy - the songbird who longs to fly over the rainbow chasing dreams and leaving behind the familiar, common, everyday boredom of, well, whatever she decided was boring. After all, she is a teenager who has a habit of getting in the way when climbing on fences and allowing her dog to bite unpleasant neighbors, not to mention that no one seems to want to listen to her when she speaks. I would want to run away to Oz, too.

And yet, in Oz, over the rainbow, Dorothy learns some very important things. She learns that the place she dreamed of is maybe not as important as the friends and relationships she has along the way. And she learns that she longs for home, which is not so much a place, but it is a feeling of belonging, one that includes people, purpose, and familiarity - of comfort and safety. Auntie Em...there's no place like home.

Slide: Home sweet home

Home. Home is where the heart is; at least that's the saying. Home is where you hang your hat - also another saying. I believe that Robert Frost called home the place where they have to take you in.

And is it any wonder? Home is that comfort we all long for. And I'm not sure I would call it a place. It's a feeling almost, like you know you are there when it happens. Sure, I have a house, but I have lived in many houses. It feels like home because of what I can count upon

to be there: the people, the dog, the comforts, the little things that make it a place I long to go to after a long day.

Slide: I go to prepare...

It might not seem like it, but in today's Gospel reading, Jesus is essentially giving his disciples red ruby slippers – click your heels together three times and say, “There's no place like home” and there you will be. You have the power already to be at home, you just don't know it, seems to be what Jesus is saying. In my Father's house, there are many dwelling places. I go to prepare it for you and it is through me that you will have this home.

In this, what is known to us today as Jesus' farewell discourse, Jesus says words of promise to his friends before he is betrayed and handed over to be crucified. In fact, he is promising this home to the very ones who will betray him and run away. How amazing it is that we have a God who still knows that despite our sin, we have a deep longing for belonging. No doubt, Jesus can tell that his disciples are deeply anxious about what is happening. They don't fully understand what is about to happen to Jesus, but they feel it. They can tell something is wrong or about to go very, very wrong.

So, what does Jesus promise them to comfort them? Home. He tells them of a home that he is giving them and that in that there he and the Father are. There is nothing more comforting than the idea of home, at least the home that is a happy place for you – a place where relationships are good and where you have purpose and hope. There is no place like it. And, Jesus wants to give it to his disciples and to us.

Here is the only snag. We tend to only think that this home Jesus is promising to us is the home that is in eternal life, a heavenly home. This is why we often hear this Gospel reading at funerals as it pertains to the heavenly home, the dwelling places that God gives to those who have died. And, it also is that kind of home. That is not untrue. But, I want to stress here that Jesus isn't simply telling us to

wait and long for a heavenly home, that until you get to heaven are you even going to know what home is.

No, Jesus is also promising a dwelling here, now, with him where we are or, rather, an indwelling with him through his Holy Spirit. That place of belonging is here, too. As we can learn from Dorothy Gale, home is not always a place, somewhere out there. Home is a relationship. And, you know you are home when you get there.

But, we can stray from home. We can leave the comforts, the promises, and the relationship that we have with God and long for that running away somewhere over the rainbow. And, we can find ourselves in places and situations where we don't know how it is we got there, but we are now in a negative, unhealthful, unproductive place in life...

- Perhaps our relationships are not life giving
- Perhaps we have made choices that have caused a negative impact upon ourselves or others
- Perhaps we have neglected our faith life and have forgotten that Jesus is in relationship with us daily

Whatever it is that has taken us away from home, Jesus has promised us that we can always return to it no matter what. He has prepared a place for you.

As the psalmist wrote in today's first reading from Psalm 31:

"Incline your ear to me; rescue me speedily. Be a rock of refuge for me, a strong fortress to save me. You are indeed my rock and my fortress; for your name's sake lead me and guide me; take me out of the net that is hidden for me, for you are my refuge."

In other words, be a home for me. Bring me to a place where you are, to a rock, a sure home. And Jesus responds with, "Do not let your hearts be troubled. I will be with you."

Slide: Ruby Slippers

At times when I long for home, when I desire to see Jesus present with me, I always go to the sacraments. More and more, especially as I age, Holy Baptism and Holy Communion become for me those pieces of home I can always go back to. The sacraments do lead to a heavenly home and the promises of eternal life, but they are also promises for now, for relationship with the risen Lord during your life to hold you up, comfort you, and sustain you.

And, although we long for that heavenly home where all the saints gone before us now rest from their labors, we also long for that dwelling place here on earth. Come back to Christ. He will give that sense of home to you. He has promised his Spirit for you and will always promise to do so. That purpose, meaning, and support is yours in relationship with the living God. Take hold of it now.

Slide: Confirmation Class Picture

Today we celebrate the Affirmation of Baptism for seven of our young people. Here at St. John's, our program otherwise known as Confirmation begins in 5th grade. They learn Bible, Luther's Catechism, and discuss faith practices along with this year, learning about the promises made to them at Holy Baptism, promises which now they will make publicly today: To live among God's faithful people, hear the word of God and share in the supper, proclaim the Good News of God in word and deed, serve all people following the example of Jesus, and strive for justice and peace in all the earth.

These promises we make when we lean into the faith that we have been given are quite daunting. They are large promises we make. They are not easy. A faithful life means we are not complicit in the world's problems but enter into them. However, what I would say today is that *God's* promises are always there, and they are always certain. There is a home for you in Christ. Humans are not perfect. We do not keep these promises very well sometimes. But

God always does keep God's promises. In Jesus, God longs to be in relationship with you and loves you as the unique, beautiful children of God that you are. We are so thankful for this day as you hear again the words from Jesus that there will always be a place for you. Wherever you go, we will pray that you will come to know these promises further and in more depth. Today is not the end to something. It is the start of a deeper relationship with the One who has been with you all along.

Home. Just like Dorothy Gale, we can always go there. We can close our eyes, click our heels three times and go there now. For, Christ is here, present with us in this house and home, in this worship, in bread and wine, water and word. That is home for now. And, there's no place like it.

Amen.