

For the people of St. Philip's  
John 14:1-14  
5 Easter  
April 20, 2008  
Maria Hoecker, preacher

It's good to be home!

As many of you may or may not have noticed, the Hoeckers slipped away from Brevard for a week's Sabbath otherwise known as Spring Break. When one lives on the campus of a church year-round, one learns that the only way to get away from work is to literally drive away for a few days. We did, and we're back. I commented to Chloe as we were driving into Brevard about 10:00 p.m. last night (Max was asleep). "It feels like home here now, doesn't it.? To be honest, her answer is still "no, Kansas feels like home." but my sense of home is shifting.

I wonder. When you think of the word or image or idea of a home, what comes to mind? Do you picture a specific building in a community? Do faces come to the surface which move through a variety of places? Is home wherever your pillow is resting? We all long for a place to call home. But how on earth do we know when at last we've found it?

"To be at home." expresses a deep longing. St. Augustine gave famous expression to this longing when he wrote of God, "You have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in thee."

I have a restless heart. More so now than ever, as I get older. As I move through the years I'm beginning to realize that people come and go as I come and go. People who have a hold on my heart are not always able to remain at my side for the duration. My many homes from past years are scattered throughout three states. I've come to deeply know that time changes everything. I'll stick my neck out here and venture to guess that at some level we all have restless hearts. At some level we are all looking for a place to rest, a place to find true and abiding peace, a place to call home. And yet, time changes everything. Home. Love. People. Places. Even those homely faces that we love, change. Nothing stays where we put it. Sometimes we turn to the Church to resist the inevitable tide of change which happens all around us. Christ is a solid rock on which to build our island homes, but the Church has been changing since it came to be. Even if we land our dream job, or find our soulmate, or raise our children, our hearts remain restless knowing that nothing lasts forever. Still, we go looking for a place to find lasting peace. "Lord, you have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in thee."

In our gospel lesson for today, we hear words that speak directly to the longing of the human heart for a permanent home. Jesus says, "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go to prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may also be."

This comes from a section of John's gospel called Jesus' "Farewell Address." In it, Jesus is preparing his disciples for the time when he will no longer be with them in the flesh. The thought of his departure is heart-breaking. But Jesus assures them that even though their relationship is changing, it is not ending. Even though he will no longer be with them in the flesh, they will remain connected. (Pagano) Jesus is going to prepare a place for them in his Father's house, where they will remain united to him forever, "so that where I am, there you may be also."

Time changes everything, at least in so far as we can grasp. I just spent a week at the beach watching the sand shift. Sand castles created by my children were swept away rhythmically with the tides. It only took about an hour of walking on the beach for us to realize that the sand under our feet was actually the crushed remains of countless shells which had once been the mobile homes of marine life. I looked at picture books of old beach homes that had long vanished after scores of hurricanes changed the landscape. Of course the folks who dwelt in those homes are long gone too. Time changes everything, on this earth, in this place.

But, thanks be to God, there is a home for us that time can not ravage. Our true home, ultimately, is not a place, but a relationship that never dies, a relationship in the very heart of God, made possible by Christ, who is timeless in the heavens. "Lord, you have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in thee."

Here's the surprise. Even though the fullness of this relationship remains in what we perceive to be our future, we can still sense the reality of God's steadfast love. Even if it is a fleeting sense, it is there forever. We can experience a foretaste of our unchanging eternal home. We catch a glimpse of our true home when we do the works that Christ commands us to do. When we love one another as Christ loved us and gave himself for us, then God's love will dwell in us. God's love will make a home in us. When the brokenhearted are comforted, God will make a home with us. When people lay down their lives for one another, then God will make a home with us. When all of God's children are invited to God's table to share in his body and blood, then God will be there too. (Pagano)

In her memoir, *Traveling Mercies*, Anne Lamott writes about why she stays so close to her church. She says, "I think we missed church ten times in twelve years. Sam would be snuggled in people's arms in the earlier shots, shyly trying to wriggle free of hugs in the later ones." She tells of their pastor Veronica who sings to them from the pulpit and who tells them stories of when she was a child. In one story she tells about a time when she was 7 years old and her best friend got lost. "The little girl ran up and down the streets of the big town where they lived, but she couldn't find a single landmark. She was frightened. Finally a policeman stopped to help her. He put her in the passenger seat of his car, and they drove around until she finally saw her church. She pointed it out to the policeman, and then she told him firmly, 'You can let me out now. This is my church, and I can always find my way home from here.'"

Lamott writes, "And that is why I have stayed so close to mine - because no matter how bad I am feeling, how lost or lonely or frightened, when I see the faces of the people at my church, when I hear their tawny voices, I can always find my way home."

"Lord, you have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in thee."

While our faces may come and go from this place, ever etched by time, our combined chorus carries us home. Together, our voices join our hearts as we sing a refrain that reaches back to our beginning and will carry us along through the never-ending story. It is a growing story of God's unchanging love for God's People.

- the commentary for this sermon is from *The Rev. Dr. Joseph S. Pagano*