

2 Corinthians 12:1-10

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Mark 6:1-6

July 7, 2024

Jon Bon Jovi sings, “who says, you can’t go home?  
. . . I spent twenty years trying to get out of this  
place . . . There’s only one place they call me one of  
their own. Who says you can’t go back?”

I don’t think the ones, whoever they were, who said  
you can’t go back ever meant to imply that once you  
leave you can’t go back for a visit. And I actually know  
a few people who, after having left, did go home and  
were able to make the transition.

Whoever *they* are, on the other hand, *had* learned  
from hard experience that once a person leaves home  
and becomes something somewhere else, the folks at  
home are unlikely to see the person one has become,  
but only the one they once were, and in that sense  
they have a point. Things are never really the same.

Myself, I can’t go back because much of the place  
and many of the places where I grew up are no longer  
there, even to visit. It all fell prey to airport expansion;  
the land on which one of the houses in which I grew  
up stood is a runway now, or just off the end of it. It is  
unrecognizable.

My ancestors, I am told, come mainly from Scotland (if  
one goes back far enough, but not too far), and I am  
going there with my son in a couple of months.

Everybody I speak to and tell them that I am planning  
to go there says, “I love Scotland,” although from  
some of what I have read one can understand why so  
many people left, it had a history and could be a hard  
place to live.

But whether one is born, lives their whole life, and dies  
in the same town, even the same house; or, never  
stops wandering, always on the move, drifting around  
with no real place to call home, one must still leave  
this earth to get to heaven.

The places we live may be highly regarded, or met  
with disdain, but these considerations do not satisfy in  
the end. We are headed somewhere, and it is not here.

Based on a reading from 12th chapter of the Letter to  
the Hebrews, Frederick Buechner called the life of  
faith, “a journey in search of a homeland.” Much of  
biblical faith is grounded in the experience of Abraham  
who left his homeland in search of a promise.

A closer look at Hebrews 12 is helpful. After  
beginning the “roll call of faith,” as it is known, about  
Abraham and all the journeying he and his  
descendants had done, the anonymous author writes,

“All these people were still living by faith when they  
died. They did not receive the things promised; they  
only saw them and welcomed them from a distance,”  
like Moses who saw the land of Israel only from  
outside it. “And they admitted they were aliens and

strangers on the earth . . . people who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own.”

And then, very interestingly, “If they had been thinking of the country they left, they would have had the opportunity to return. Instead, they were longing for a better country - - a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them.”

Jesus went back to his hometown, and they did not fail to play their role; they saw him only as he had been. They heard his teaching and saw his powerful works and they said, in so many words, “who does he think he is? Does he think we do not remember him? They inspired the line;

“Only in his hometown, among his relatives, and in his own house is a prophet without honor.”

For Jesus, going home was not like it was for Bon Jovi, whose people were the only ones that accepted him, “as one of their own.” He didn’t have to be a rock star there. Maybe things are different for rock stars than they are for prophets.

For Jesus, it meant rejection. “He could not do any miracles there, except lay his hands on a few people and heal them.” He marveled at their unbelief.

It was the whole saga of Israel, always characterized by their status as outsiders or their sojourns through wilderness or through exile and servitude. Even the

hometown of Jesus was not in his home country of Judea, but up in Galilee, the land of the gentiles.

And there is Paul, who was from Tarsus in Cilicia (right in the middle of Turkey, who was on the move most of his life, in Jerusalem, and he went to Damascus, and spent some time in Arabia; on to Antioch in Syria, and Lystra, Derbe, Pergamum, and another Antioch, the one in Pisidia; and on to Europe; Philippi, Berea and Thessalonica, Athens and Corinth, across the Aegean to Ephesus, and eventually Rome itself. Always the outsider, adapting and adaptable. The *world* was his home. No place on earth was home.

So it is not surprising that when Paul describes what must have been *one* of the *most* important events of his life, it was *not* about a childhood experience at the family home back in Tarsus, or a pilgrimage to Jerusalem the sacred city, but a vision of the third heaven. In Philippians he confesses that if he had a choice he would opt for the heavenly home, “to live is Christ, to die is gain.”

In any case, Paul was taken up into the third heaven, whatever that is, and the experience of it was so overwhelmingly good that it caused him to think more highly of himself than he ought. In response God gave him a problem, or set of problems, whatever is meant by a, thorn in the flesh,” about which believers have had a delightful time hypothesizing over the years. It was something to trouble him. Paul complained about it, prayed to be delivered from it.

At long last, the answer came, and the answer he was given stays in the mind once it has been heard or read, because it is our answer too, to whatever set of experiences have come to characterize our lives, for good or ill,

“My *grace* is sufficient for thee, for my *power* is made perfect in weakness.”

Home is where grace is enough, and where peace is found in weakness because it is in weakness that grace is accepted, and faith is born and begins to grow and flourish. And that can happen anywhere.

Part of our searching is for a better world here; a world without injustice and poverty and war and disease, the whole litany. And it is a search for our better selves; less selfish, less angry, less afraid, more kind and empathetic, more forgiving, courageous, searching for an honorable way to be as we wait and search.

And these are not only a part of our searching but they are our destination. As long as we are always working at it, we are in a way, home, as much as any place on earth can be home.

In the end our true home is beyond death and we can catch only glimpses of it here, enough to keep us journeying, as it was for Jesus whose destiny was not Nazareth but Golgotha, on the way to God's right hand. It is not here, and the searching for it here in this life or on this planet somewhere, will end up in disappointment, a search in all the wrong places.

Perhaps the best way to say it is that the faith journey itself *is* our home while we are here. Never stop journeying it. And allow our earthly homes a kind of break, because, as good as they *can* be, they will never be our spiritual home. It doesn't do for us to have for them unrealistic expectations.

Today is Communion Sunday, we take a few minutes before the altar where the bread and the cup are made available to us. This ritual is a reminder of, among other things, our true home, where we are nourished, in the faith that what Jesus said in Matthew's gospel with the words of institution at the Last Supper will turn out to be true,

“I tell you, I will not drink from this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom.” That is, we *can* go home, more than that, will go home, that is the promise, will all be home together with our Lord Jesus Christ.

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