

## THIS IS HOME

John 14:23

Crossroads/September 28, 2008/Pastor Joyce Anderson-Reed

A father passed by his son's bedroom and was astonished to see the bed nicely made up and everything neat and tidy. Then he saw an envelope propped up on the pillow. It was addressed, "Dad." With the worst premonition, he opened the envelope and read the letter with trembling hands:

Dear Dad,

It is with great regret and sorrow that I'm writing you. I had to elope with my new girlfriend because I wanted to avoid a scene with you and Mom. I've been finding real passion with Joan, and she is so nice. I knew you would not approve of her because of all her piercings, tattoos, tight motorcycle clothes, and the fact that she is so much older than I am. It's not just her passion, Dad. She really *gets* me.

Joan says that we are going to be very happy. She owns a trailer in the woods and has a stack of firewood—just enough for the whole winter. We share a dream of having many children.

Please don't worry, Dad. I'm 15 and I know how to take care of myself. I'm sure we'll be back to visit someday so you can get to know your grandchildren.

Your son, Chad

P.S. Dad, none of the above is true. I'm over at Tommy's house. I just wanted to remind you that there are worse things in life than the report card that's in my desk drawer. I love you! Call when it is safe for me to come home. (Submitted by Charles Kimball, Allen, Texas. An illustration posted at [preachingtoday.com](http://preachingtoday.com))

Home.

A word that conjures not only a physical place, but also the people and relationships that fill this place.

Home.

A word that we want to equate with safety, love, and forgiveness. But sometimes, reality doesn't match up to the dream.

Home.

As that word echoes inside the chambers of your heart this morning . . . notice your body language right now—are you tense or relaxed? Your breathing—rapid or slow? Your thoughts—organized or scattered? Your emotions—joyful or angry? Your spirit—at peace, or in turmoil?

Home.

T.S. Eliot said, “Home is where we start from.”

Most of my childhood memories center around a two-story brick house in a suburban neighborhood of the coal-mining town, Elizabeth, PA. My father pastored a church there for eight years, from the time I was 6-years-old until I was 14-years-old.

I had what most would consider an idyllic childhood. Two parents that loved each other. A dog named Millie. Friends I cared about. A bicycle to ride with the wind. Lots of books to read. And in the midst of all of that, I met Jesus as my personal Lord and Savior.

Home.

But some people I know weren't so blessed. I know a young Mexican girl who—at age 11—was sold into prostitution by her father so he could have money to buy drugs. At the conference on Prostitution and Human Trafficking I attended two weeks ago, I heard numerous testimonies of men and women who grew up in abusive situations. And I know that some of you had traumatic childhood experiences as well.

Home.

The contrasts are vivid. The joy as intense as the pain. Wholeness. Brokenness. Longing.

Even our best attempts to make a home can go awry. Families are messy. Relationships are layers and layers of, well, stuff. Good stuff. Bad stuff. Some stuff we can explain. Some stuff we don't even have words for. It accumulates. Sometimes we get lost. And then we don't know where home is anymore.

This happened to me. Some of you know that three years ago my dad suddenly announced that he no longer loved my mother—a woman he'd been married to for 47 years—and that he wanted a divorce. It was a shock wave that leveled me. Home as I'd always known it crumbled in moments.

A year after the divorce, my dad remarried and invited me to come visit him in his new home. It took me nine months to gather the courage. To find enough grace. Because I was angry for a long time. I grieved a long time. In fact, if I'm honest, there are still days when I'm angry or grief-stricken over the break-up of my parent's marriage. But during that first year there were especially a lot of dark days; I struggled to find forgiveness. I didn't want to forgive my father. I felt deeply and utterly betrayed.

And it took a confrontation with Jesus to turn me around.

I was lying on my bed, furious with my dad over a recent phone conversation we'd just had. A conversation where he “just didn't get it.” It being all the pain and misery he invoked inside of me every time he talked about his “new” family and his “new” wife.

I didn't want to forgive my father. I was arguing with Jesus about it. And Jesus said to my heart, clear as a bell, "I died for him too, Joyce."

"What?" My heart was beating wildly.

"You know how I died for your sins—past, present and future? Well, I died for his too. If I can forgive him, so can you."

Well, that shut me up.

I didn't want to think of my dad as a repentant sinner, redeemed by Christ's blood, being lifted up out of the muck. Fine, let Jesus redeem all those thieves, liars, murderers and rapists out there. But not my dad. I wanted him to suffer for awhile. But Jesus said I needed to forgive him. This wasn't a gentle tap on the shoulder. It was a Godly punch to my gut.

It took me nine months. That's the nice thing about Jesus. He gives you time to adjust.

And then I booked the flight to Georgia and went to visit my father, his wife, and her adult children who all lived within driving distance of them. It was hard. It hurt. But God helped me to find peace as well. There were even moments of laughing together. And it became the first step of actually forgiving my father. Of learning to let go of bitterness, so that I could move forward in grace.

And as I began to forgive, I was no longer lost. I was coming home. With my earthly father. And . . . with my heavenly father.

Home.

When Jered was a little boy, his parents were careful to teach him his phone number and address in case he was ever lost.

One night, he and his dad went for a before-bedtime walk. After a few minutes of silence, his father Dan decided to test Jered's knowledge of where he lived.

"How far are we from home?" Dan asked.

Jered answered, "Dad, I don't know."

Dan tried again, "Well, where are you?"

Again Jered answered, "I don't know."

Then his dad said good-naturedly, "Sounds to me like you're lost, son."

With a confident grin, Jered looked up at his dad and responded, "Nope. I can't be lost. I'm with you." (Mary Southerland, *Unleashing The Power Of God In My Life: Peace*)

Home.

Emily Dickinson said "Home is the definition of God."

Have you ever thought of God as home? A place, a person, a relationship to belong to?

Jesus said in John 14:23 . . . "If anyone loves me, he will obey my teachings. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him."

Did you know this promise was actually in the Bible? That if you choose to love Jesus, to obey his teachings, then God will not only love you back, but He will come and make a home with you?

Yes, you and God. Together. The God of the Universe and You. Incredible, and terrifying, isn't it? You and God making a home together.

Esther de Waal in her book *The Celtic Way of Prayer* says this: "I have to think of myself as a space, a sacred space, in which God dwells. This can be difficult if I do not value myself very highly or have low self-esteem. Or perhaps I resist the whole idea because I would prefer to keep God distant, safe. Yet here I have to accept that Christ has chosen to live in me already, now.

"I am surrounded by Christ in every direction. He is present in every dimension in my life. He is beneath me in the certainty of the ground beneath my feet. He is beside me close at hand, walking with me, on my level, seeing things with the eyes that I see. And so I go on, trying to realize the full implication of what I am saying—and praying." (page 26)

Christ beside me, Christ before me  
Christ behind me, Christ within me  
Christ beneath me, Christ above me  
Christ to the right of me, Christ to the left of me  
Christ in my lying, my sitting, my rising  
Christ in my heart of all who know me  
Christ on tongue of all who meet me  
Christ in eye of all who see me  
Christ in ear of all who hear me.  
(Stanza VII of St. Patrick's Breastplate, page 19, *The Celtic Way of Prayer*)

Home.

Some people think that once you have a relationship with God, then that means God is at your beck and call. As if He becomes your servant. God, I need this. God, please get me that. God, would you take care of this problem. And not only is He our servant, but we also want

everything on microwave time. Immediately. Just pop that prayer request in the oven and thirty seconds later we have an answer.

But what kind of relationship would that be?

Do we want a relationship where our every whim is fulfilled? Where our love is based on give-me, give-me, give-me? Or are we looking for something deeper, more substantial. A give and take that is built on integrity, honor, and truth.

Thomas Merton said, "If you find God with great ease, perhaps it is not God that you have found."

If we take God up on his offer to make a home together, what does that mean?

Yes, it does mean forgiveness, peace, unconditional love, protection, and everlasting life. But Jesus also said "take up your cross and follow me."

The cross of Jesus led him to Calvary. He paid the ultimate sacrifice so that you and I might be adopted as God's children, so that we might have a home to come back too.

What does a cross look like? Sacrifice. Hardship. Betrayal. Rejection. Pain. Abandonment. Loneliness. Misunderstandings. Grief. Loss of Health. Death. Coming face-to-face with evil.

Relationships are messy enough. Throw a cross into the mix, and it will probably lead to places you'd rather not go. Thanks God, but no thanks.

But in Hebrews 12:2-3 it says:

Keep your eyes on Jesus, who both began and finished this race we're in. Study how he did it. Because he never lost sight of where he was headed - that exhilarating finish in and with God - he could put up with anything along the way: cross, shame, whatever. And now he's there, in the place of honor, right alongside God. When you find yourselves flagging in your faith, go over that story again, item by item, that long litany of hostility he plowed through. That will shoot adrenaline into your souls!

Jesus will never ask you to go where he has not already been.

Roman 8:17 assures us:

We go through exactly what Christ goes through. If we go through the hard times with him, then we're certainly going to go through the good times with him!

Neither will Jesus abandon you along the way. That's his family promise. "I will not leave you as orphans. I will come to you." (John 14:18)

The truth about God's family is available for you to read, in every major language spoken in the world. All you have to do is pick up a Bible. There are no secret rules. No clandestine meetings. No special words of power. No special requirements.

In fact. All you have to do is open the door. Jesus said, "Look at me. I stand at the door. I knock. If you hear me call and open the door, I'll come right in and sit down to supper with you." (Revelation 3:20)

Supper. Sharing a meal together. Conversation. A sense of belonging.

Home.

Have you ever been homesick?

Two little boys were being cared for by their grandmother while their parents went away to celebrate their anniversary. On the first night, just before bedtime, the parents called to wish them goodnight. As each one took a turn talking with their mom and dad, the tears began to flow. Soon, they were both inconsolable. The whole situation had become too much.

The boys were tired, their mom and dad were sooo far away, and, as much as they love their grandma, she wasn't mom and dad. Josh eventually fell asleep with his mouth wide open, still crying. Nate, being older, couldn't stop thinking about his parents. He said outloud: "Grandma, I'm homesick, and I'm home. How can that be?" (Pat Bailey, Batavia, Illinois; TheChancel.com)

How indeed? This little boy realized a great truth early in life. Home is more than a physical location. It's also a network of relationships with people you love.

There are days, especially in September when it's still over 100 degrees in La Paz, when I get homesick for fall on the East Coast. I miss the oak and maple trees changing colors. I miss picking apples in the orchards. I miss the crispness that brings a bite to the air.

But more than places, I get homesick for people I love. People with whom I have a history. People with whom I don't have to first fill in all the blanks before we dive into significant conversation. People that I hug tightly and think, "Yes, this is home."

Last month the father of one of my friends in Alaska died of congestive heart failure. His name was Richard Harding. He had been a missionary pastor in Cordova, AK for over 40 years. Richard's best friend was Evan Jones. Evan died four years ago from a brain tumor. Evan was a pastor in Alaska too. In fact, he was my mentor in ministry right after seminary. His death left a huge hole in my heart. So several weeks ago, when I heard about Richard's death, I just started sobbing. It made me miss and grieve for Evan all over again. All I could think about was Evan greeting Richard at the door of heaven and saying, "About time you got here! Wait til you see this place!"

And it made me homesick.

For Richard. For Evan. For Alaska. For Heaven. For God.

Have you ever had moments like that? When people, places and God are all rolled into one eternal moment? And your heart hurts. Aches.

I'm so tired of saying goodbye to people. My heart is divided between people in different states. And now that I live in Mexico, it's divided in pieces over people in different countries. Amy Grant has a song called "Cry a River." I understand exactly what she means.

Rainer Maria Rilke in his *Book of Hours: Love Poems to God*, says this: "You, the great homesickness we could never shake off."

And I thought about being homesick for God. How I can be Home with God, and still Homesick for God? The *already* and the *not yet* aspect of God's Kingdom. His Kingdom here on earth. His kingdom I've yet to see in heaven.

There *are* moments when I get glimpses of heaven on earth.

I remember the first time I visited Denali National Park in Alaska. The grandeur of snow-peaked Mt. McKinley. The red-gold of the tundra. The wide expanse of pristine nature. The glory of it. And my heart ached.

I remember praying with people at Crossroads for C.E. who was battling brain cancer. Anointing him with oil. Laying hands on him. Sensing the power of God fill this place. And my heart ached.

I remember the Sunday I sang the hymn *Great is Thy Faithfulness* at a Mexican church service and realized that I now remembered more of the words in Spanish than in English, and how in that moment I felt a unity of spirit with my Mexican brothers & sisters in Christ. And my heart ached.

Glimpses of heaven. Glimpses of God.

Home.

In the series *The Chronicles of Narnia*, Peter, Susan, Edmund and Lucy are torn between their home in England and their home in Narnia. In the book *Prince Caspian*, most recently seen in movie theaters this past year, the four return to Narnia only to discover that their home at Cair Paravel is not as they remembered it. And they learn that their understanding of home needs to change. As Aslan later tells Lucy when they meet in the forest, "Things never happen the same way twice." (Prince Caspian, Chapter Ten: "The Return of the Lion," page 150)

As the four siblings are figuring out what home now means, at the same time Prince Caspian is also struggling with his definition of home. He is searching for a place to belong. Orphaned at birth, raised by an uncle who usurps his throne, he flees his rightful home to seek the aid of the Narnian creatures. Creatures that he'd always thought were a myth until Dr. Cornelius reveals to the prince, "All you've heard about Old Narnia is true." When Caspian finally meets the Old Narnians, he tells them, "I want to stay with you—if you'll let me. I've been looking for people like you all my life."

Home.

At the conclusion of the movie, the Christian Rock group Switchfoot performs a song called *This is Home*. Listen to the closing verse and chorus:

And I got my heart  
Set on  
What happens next  
I got my eyes wide  
It's not over yet  
We are miracles  
And we're not alone

And now after all  
My searching  
After all my questions  
I'm gonna call it home  
I got a brand new mindset  
I can finally see  
The sunset  
I'm gonna call it home

Chorus:

This is home  
Now I'm finally  
Where I belong  
Yeah, this is home  
I've been searching  
For a place of my own  
Now I've found it  
Yeah, this is home

I've come too far  
Now I won't go back  
This is home.

Like Narnia, some places are worth risking for.  
Like Peter, Susan, Edmund, Lucy and Prince Caspian, some people are worth risking for.  
Like Aslan, Jesus will meet you and let you know you're not alone.

We are miracles.  
We belong to God.  
We belong to each other.

Welcome Home.