



Sermons

from Northwood United Church

“Finding our way home”
2 Corinthians 5:16-20, John 21:25-36
Will Sparks

May the words of my mouth, the meditations of our hearts, and the actions of our lives be acceptable in your sight O God, our strength and our redeemer. Amen

Do you have a memory of going home for Christmas? Do you remember a time when you were away from wherever you called home at the time and sometime in December you packed up your things, gathered gifts, hopped on a bus or a plane or got into the car and made your way home for Christmas? Do you remember what that was like, both to not be home, and to go home? Or maybe you have a memory of not being able to be home for Christmas, and having to “make Christmas” away from home, of feeling homesick during this season.

I think that this season creates in us a longing for home, for a place and a time and an experience of familiar comfort, of ease, and of belonging. That is why we sing the same songs year after year- Oh the new stuff is good but we need a hefty dose of the old familiar to feed that longing for home. This is a season of traditions, or bringing out the old ornaments and putting them on the tree, not because the painted macaroni ornament that a child made 35 years ago is particularly beautiful, but because it reminds us of belonging, and of home.

This longing for home is the reason this can so often be such a hard season for people. I remember when I moved to Saskatoon from my beloved home in Victoria to go to seminary, I was so homesick. And I was looking forward to going back a year later. And after my first year in seminary, I did go back, but when I got there and went to my home church of St. Aidans, there were people there I had never seen before, and others, some old familiar ones were gone, and they had changed some things, and if truth be told, I had changed too, and it wasn't really home anymore. Home had moved and I realized I couldn't go back. If you have experienced change in your life, something happens to home, and this season in which we long for home can be really hard. We can experience a real gap between the way things are and the way we long for them to be.

Which brings me to Paul's message. Paul had a clear sense of the gap between the way things are and the way things ought to be. And Paul saw it in big terms- that the world was not at home, and that somehow in Christ, God had done something huge to bridge the gap, to reconcile the difference, to bring the world home again. Paul said, God was in Christ, reconciling the world to God's self. God was in Christ bringing the world and God together again. Bringing it home.

There are many ways we feel this gap between the way life is and the way life would be if we were completely at home in our world. We experience that personally in our own self- we can feel not at home in ourself. We experience it in life, like our life is not where we want it to be or where we are called to have it be. Sometimes our life feels alien to us, not like home. We can feel the gap socially- politically, like our community is not quite home to us. The commercialism of this season often gives me that feeling- a feeling of alienation from the very celebration that is supposed to be so central to my life and my faith.

This week I had a stunning example of the gap politically. I am Canadian in every sense. Canada is home to me. I have always had a strong sense of rootedness in this country and it is not only about geography, but it is about values. But this week I felt like an alien in my own home when a friend who has come to Canada from Sri Lanka seeking refuge, fleeing violence

was sent a letter saying that his refugee status, refused back in August was not appealable, and that he would be sent away. Canada could not be home to him, even if he feared he and his family would be harmed in Sri Lanka. Now, I suppose the merits of his case are debatable, but I believe his fear is real. We do have a system to deal with situations like this, but in recent years, our Canadian system of receiving refugees has been emptied of the compassion that I had always been so proud of. And as I watch my home country, a country made largely of immigrants and refugees if you go back far enough, refuse refuge, my home felt alien to me. I felt the gap, and it stung. And I am angry, because something very precious is being stripped away from my home.

God was in Christ, reconciling the world to God's self, bridging the gap between the way things are and the way things ought to be, coming among us that we might find our way home—home personally, within ourselves, home spiritually, in our relationship with God, socially, in a network of relationships, politically, in the fabric of community that we call home. The birth of Jesus is about God coming among us and showing us the way home on all levels. As we enter this season, may God be among us and within us, reconciling us to our true selves, helping us find our way home. Amen.