

Easter 6, Year A, 2011

“Sometimes I feel like a motherless child, sometimes I feel like a motherless child, sometimes I feel like a motherless child, a long ways from home, a long ways from home.”

Do you ever feel like that, like a motherless child? Do you ever feel a long ways from home? I do.

I’ve still got my adoring, nurturing mother, who lives in my childhood home, just 20 minutes away, where I’m always welcome and still have junk stored. And I have a home here, in this church, and in my vocation, for which I know I was made, and in the heart and life of my husband, and children, and friends, and in my house on Kirby Street, which hasn’t been destroyed by recent violent storms, like so many others’.

And yet, still, a lot, I feel like a motherless child, orphaned, lost, wandering, rootless, a long, long ways from home.

I suspect you do, too. I hear it in your stories, and I see it in your eyes. And I know our friends do, those who leave us on Wednesday night, or Sunday night, to return to the streets, or a garage, or a car, or, if they’re very lucky, to a cheap hotel room.

It’s universal, I guess, this wandering, this lostness, this longing for home. In fact, to be human is to feel homeless, whether in a lonely heart, or on a shelter cot, or somewhere in-between.

Because our homelessness is most truly about our life in God, whose love is our only resting place of belonging, our only true home.

And the doorway to that home is our own heart, where God is waiting to welcome us, but that seems way too simple, so it’s the last place we look, wandering and searching for home everywhere else instead.

We look amongst the bejillion other gods that seem easier to find and closer at hand, and offer some short relief from that lostness and longing – money, relationships, health, beauty, solitude, belonging, food, alcohol, drugs, work, travel, knowledge, safety, peace, and control, to name just a few.

That’s what Paul was dealing with at the Areopagus in Athens, a people of many gods, who’d built an idol to each one, including the one they couldn’t think of a name for, “the unknown god”, either to cover their bases, or maybe because, even with all those other gods, they still felt motherless and homeless!

I like what he does with them, how he first comes alongside them, complementing their spiritual curiosity, honoring their truth before presenting his own.

It's something to take note of, if we would bring Jesus to a people that's every bit as pluralistic as they were. First learning who they are, speaking their language, knowing their questions before giving our answers. That's what helped Paul lead some of them home to the God of love they were missing.

It seems as though everywhere, always, we humans have searched for the god who is our home, everywhere but here, in our own hearts.

And we'll always feel motherless, a long ways from home, until we turn to the God who's at home right here, always waiting, with the light on, with the door flung wide open. And I suspect that none of us will ever really get home, not all the way home, until all of us do.

Maybe that's why the rapture was postponed last week. Perhaps heaven wasn't ready for a whole bunch of folks who were quite willing to leave lots of other folks behind. It can't be home, at least not for God, until all of us are there.

There is an ancient Hindu legend that claims we all were gods, once upon a time, but we didn't respect our divinity, and neglected and abused it. So Brahma, the chief god, decided to hide our divinity where we'd never be able to find it. The council of gods debated as to where that might be.

"Way down in the earth," said one. But Brahma thought we'd finally learn to dig, and find it there.

"Then in the deepest waters of the sea," said another. But he figured we'd eventually learn to dive and discover it down on the ocean floor.

"Perhaps at the top of the highest mountain," said yet another god. But Brahma knew that, sooner or later, we'd climb every mountain on earth, and finally find our hidden divinity.

Seeing that there was nowhere on land or sea or even the sky we wouldn't one day reach, Brahma declared, "I know! We'll hide their divinity deep down within them. They'll never think to look for it there."

And ever since then, says the legend, we have been looking - digging, diving, climbing, and wandering in search of something that's right there within us.

God is *here*, adoring us from within, closer to us, said Augustine, than we are to ourselves, with a love that is our one, true, sure and final home.

Listen to how Jesus tells it, in the few verses that follow today's reading which, for some reason, are left out and I can't imagine why because they're such good news!

“Whoever loves me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them, and make our home with them.”

We will come to *them*, and *make our home with them*.”

Imagine that - God chooses us for his home! Not some remote, lofty, perfect, ethereal, or more spiritual place, but us, our hearts.

It's not what I'd have done. If I were God, I'd have chosen anything but the fragile, fickle human heart as my home. Which is why it's hard for me to believe God is at home there, and why I'm usually not.

But that's what Jesus promised: my Father will love them, and we will come and make our home with them.

The preacher Barbara Brown Taylor says, “God won't just visit, pass through from time to time, send a postcard. God will make a home, an abode large enough for the love which binds Jesus to his Father and to us, a giant heart of a place with room enough for everyone whom love unites. John's idea of heaven is to move in with the god who has moved in with us.”

So, have you? Would you? Will you? Dare you to rest from your ceaseless, frantic, hungry, meandering, fruitless searching for home in all the places it can never be found, and move in with the god who has moved in with you, this god who longs to keep company with you there, whose cosmic love fits itself into your little oh-so-human fleshy heart, and leaves no one, anywhere, ever, not even you, a motherless child?

This God brings us home, and that homecoming is the source of a love that turns us right around and sends us out in search of the others who still think they're orphans. Because the call and work of this spiritual at-home-ness is to bring others into to it.

Home to the awareness of the God *within* us.

Home to the adoring love of the God who is *for* us.

Home to a people and the God who is *with* us.

Home to the safety, shelter, food, health, peace and belonging God mean for each of us to have.

Home is all of these things, all meant for all God's children, and none of us will finally be there, until all of us are.

What if we each made for ourselves a personal mission statement with those words Jesus spoke in the gospel today, I in you and you in me, I in you and you in me. With an addendum. And we, together, for them. Perhaps we'd find ourselves home.