

**May 2, 2021 The Fifth Sunday of Easter**

**Ladue Chapel Presbyterian Church**

**Psalm 122, Revelation 21:1-4**

**"Welcome Home"**

**Douglas King**

Thomas Moore writes "In *The Poetics of Space*, French philosopher Gaston Bachelard describes home in this way: 'All really inhabited space bears the essence of the notion of home.' We could be in a room anywhere, out in nature, in someone else's house, or at work, and still feel at home. All that is required, according to Bachelard, is truly to inhabit the space. The word 'inhabit' comes from a root that means to give and to receive. We inhabit a place when we give something to it and when we open ourselves to receive what it has to offer. (Moore, p, 77-78)

Welcome home. After all these many long months, welcome home. Indeed this sanctuary is a home for so many of us, as it certainly should be.

Our first reading this morning, Psalm 122, is one of the fifteen psalms of ascent in the psalter. These are the songs that pilgrims sang as they journeyed to Jerusalem and the temple so they could worship together on the high holy days. Psalm 122 is a psalm of joyful anticipation as the people approach their destination, their beloved house of worship.

We know that God is present in every corner of creation. And that every corner of creation is a suitable place in which to offer praise and worship to our God. But it is also true that certain places are set aside in our hearts as what the

Celtics call thin places, places where the veil between our material world and the world of the divine seem a little more permeable. For the ancient Israelites the temple in Jerusalem was a thin place, a place where they experienced the presence of God in a particularly strong way. For many of us this sanctuary is a thin place, a place where we have found ourselves experiencing the holy over the years.

This time separated from this place has been a burden to us. For all of the ways we continued to worship together over the past year, the hunger to return together to this place has never wavered. As we reenter this sanctuary today, even in our masks, socially distanced, and with reduced numbers, we celebrate the return. We sing our own psalm of ascent as we return home.

As we heard from Bachelard the root of the word to "inhabit" a home includes the connotations of giving and receiving. This definition is helpful as we gather to worship here once again for worship involves both of these actions. Oftentimes when we think about worship we think about what we receive from it. We love sitting in the beauty of this room. The music transports us to a place of joy. The prayers center us for our week. Being in the midst of those we love and care for brings us comfort. Hopefully, fingers crossed, the sermons teach us something, or remind us of some truth we have known.

But as we have been told, to inhabit a home, any place we call home, is about both receiving and giving. When we gather in this sanctuary, fellowship hall, and online, to worship we are called to glorify God. As Kierkegaard notes worship is a performance we all perform together for the divine in an effort to make a sacrifice pleasing to God. We sing, we pray, we pass

the peace, we affirm what we believe, we present our offerings. We demonstrate to God our gratitude and indebtedness. We make what has been called a living sacrifice. So this is indeed a home for us. This is a place, where together, we receive so much and we give so much.

In the tradition of the Eastern Orthodox Church when they gather in the sanctuary for worship it is believed that the heavenly host descends into the room, blowing trumpets, dancing away, and a grand party ensues.

In our reading from the book of Revelation this morning we are given a vivid picture of the renewal of all creation that is to come. The author, John of Patmos, is writing during a time of Christian persecution and is in search of a promise for the future. We are told of "the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven...prepared as a bride adorned for her husband." And we are told that the home of God will be among mortals and the divine will dwell with us, every tear will be wiped from our eyes, death and mourning, and crying and pain will be no more. When we gather in this place and worship together we are rehearsing for that day. We are practicing what it will be like when indeed, all of the first things have passed away.

There are so many different ways for us to think about what it means when we gather together for worship. It is a pilgrimage to a thin place where we will encounter the divine. It is a time when we receive so much and seek to give so much. It is a performance in which we engage to please our God. It is a grand party. It is a rehearsal for God's renewal of all creation when everything and everyone is brought to perfection in God's healing embrace. But perhaps the one that rings the most true

in our ears this morning is the one with which we started, it is a return home.

So much of the Biblical narrative is some form of a quest for home. Abraham and Sarah journeying and trusting in God's promises over many years that they will have a home of their own. Jacob and Esau finding home in their powerful reunion. Joseph forgiving his brothers and creating home in a new place for them all. The journey through the wilderness, as the newly liberated Israelites went in search of the home of the Promised Land. The hunger of the exiles to return home and rebuild Jerusalem. Job's anguished cries for the loss of his home.

Home is a universal hunger that we all seek to satisfy in a variety of ways. And that hunger for home in all its forms is a hunger for our God, our ultimate and eternal home. As Augustine once prayed, "Our hearts are restless until they find our rest in you." Or another translation could be "Our hearts are without a home until they find our home in you." And the quote from Augustine always reminds me of a quote from Robert Frost, "Home is the place where, when you have to go there, they have to take you in."

Those pilgrims on their way to Jerusalem felt that same hungry restlessness of Augustine and were ebullient with expectation they would be filled. John of Patmos, weighed down by the turmoil and danger of his time, found his sole hope in God's arrival to bring a home to us.

This hunger, this need to find our home in God could place us in a debilitating place of anxiety. What if God were to choose to not welcome us home? Well, Robert Frost might not exactly be a theologian but all we have been taught about the grace of Jesus Christ teaches us that his quote about home also

applies to finding our home in God. "Home is the place where, when you have to go there, they have to take you in."

Indeed, and thank God.

This year plus of exile from this sanctuary has been a difficult ordeal. As worshipful and enriching as online worship has been for us, being unable to worship in this space has been a sacrifice. Yes, in the obvious ways of missing the fellowship of gathering together, and the aesthetic pleasure of being in this room. But I think it also played on our psyches to some degree. Not being able to be in this home of ours may have created an underlying sense that we were being kept from God, that we could be kept from God, that it was possible that the home we are seeking in the divine could be denied us.

Of course we rationally know this not to be true. We know that God is everywhere. We know that God's grace cannot be denied by geography. We know that God is inviting and welcoming us home in all places and all times. But as humans we crave particularity and community, this is why people of faith gather together to build shrines, and churches, and cathedrals. As we seek a home in our God we create physical places where we can indeed envision a time when death and mourning, and crying and pain will be no more and the home of God will be among mortals. And we find in each other's fellowship, joy and comfort, a sign of the ways God welcomes us.

So today we celebrate our return to this holy space. We celebrate being together, in this sanctuary, in our fellowship hall, and online, bound together by God's Holy Spirit. And most importantly we celebrate and praise our God, the one who is our ultimate and eternal home.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

Moore, Thomas, *The Re-Enchantment of Everyday Life*,  
HarperCollins, New York, 1996.