

November 29, 2015
Jeremiah 33:14-16

Advent 1C
The King's City: Safe and Secure

Grace, mercy, and peace be yours from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Question: Where do you live? Where do you call home?

The answer was easy for Dorothy from Wizard of Oz...her home was in Kansas, she spoke those famous words, "There's no place like home, there's no place like home."

Where you live for most if not all of us is an easy answer. For me, I live in the parsonage. The second question though sometimes is not an easy one to answer. I'd have to think about where my home is...sure, home is where my family, my wife and girls, is now, which would be Fisher...but then in the other respect home is the house on Gruber St. in Antigo, WI where I spent the first 18 years of my life and my parents still live. The answer is also difficult because many times our mobile society keeps us moving, yes, mobile, and often unstable and even restless. In our virtual world of electronic reality, space and time are both expanded and compressed in a confusing and dazzling, and sometimes dizzying way.

You see, we all want and need a place to call home. Sociologists have come to the remarkable conclusion that a safe and stable home has an enormous positive effect on child development—who would have thought!! Adults often recall fond childhood memories, which may also include that fateful moment when we wanted to run away from home—perhaps we also packed our backpack, got a block or two down the road or even just down the driveway before the rights and liberties of independence gave way to the certainties and securities of a place called home. Then we like Dorothy will say, "There's no place like home, there's no place like home."

This is a universal truth, engaging all cultures in all times and places. We don't know a lot about the emotions of home life in Bible times, but we do know that family and land and home and hearth were an anchor in life where being "on the road" was no less dangerous than in our day and age.

The "home" that engages us in our text today is really even greater than our traditional family home—it is the home of a whole country, a nation, a people. And in our Advent lessons this year from the Old Testament prophets, we will listen and learn about God's kingdom, and God's king, and what it meant to be the people of God in his kingdom.

In the days of the Old Testament prophets, the kingdom of God on earth was under the human leadership of the Davidic king. A king had his palace, as well as the temple, in his capital city, which became the focal point and even identity of his rule and reign.

For our spiritual ancestors in the Old Testament, that was, of course, Jerusalem, or more theologically focused, Zion. In fact, Zion was the citadel of God's "palace" (i.e.,

the temple—it's the same word in Hebrew) or dwelling place in the midst of his people, in the temple.

And a brief side point on this is that there was often a good deal of tension between the king's palace and God's temple, as the king sometimes forgot that his place was "next door" to the temple, and not the other way around, and that he was the under-shepherd who ruled on God's terms...not his own. Many the king forgot that in the Old Testament.

In the time of Jeremiah the prophet, the time of our text for this morning, both the kind and the temple were being threatened, and even under siege by the Babylonians and their king, Nebuchadnezzar. There was a good and godly reason for this, and Jeremiah had made it clear to all...both king and people had forsaken their God; they had followed the ways of the world and the religious practices of the world. They had also just assumed that if they did just enough to keep the temple worship going, bringing sacrifices and offerings, then God would be pleased, even appeased, and that he would protect them. After all, He was their God, and they were His people...His chosen people nevertheless.

In the eyes of the international press, the "CNN, MSNBC, and FoxNEWS" of that day, the siege of Jerusalem looked like just another act of aggression and expansion by the dominant world power at that time. In the eyes of prophets, priests, and some of the people this was God's righteous judgment of the sins of his people. In the eyes of the king and most of the people, this seemed to be an unfair action by a God who should be saving them, NOT DESTROYING THEM.

Jeremiah, though, stood up to the false prophets, who "prophesied peace when there was no peace," and he stood up to the king, who refused to believe either that the city would fall or that this was God's just judgment against him, his leadership, and the sins of all.

All this eventually got Jeremiah to become the object of scorn; he was put in stocks and then in prison. So much for the life of a faithful prophet.

But...Jeremiah had a bigger picture. He knew God's judgment, but he also knew that this was part of a larger plan, not to destroy and kill, but to restore and make alive. Right in the midst of all this message of judgment comes a section of his book that speaks of God's love, his everlasting love and commitment to his people. Yes, God would punish them, with the "tough love" that takes discipline seriously. Yes, their sin had to be punished. Yes, Jerusalem, the "home" of king and people, would be lost, and they would be refugees in exile. They, too, would be crying... "There's no place like home."

You see...God had a future and a hope for them. In fact, just as the siege of Jerusalem was underway, Jeremiah even bought a field – invested in real estate – just to demonstrate his conviction that God was committed to this land and to bringing the

people back to it. He saw a future for both the king and the city, and he described them both in the same way:

In those days (those days yet to come, when God would fulfill his promises once and for all), and at that time (yes, at God's "right time," not ours), I will cause a righteous branch to spring up for David, and he will execute justice and righteousness in the land. In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will dwell securely. And this is the by which it (Jerusalem) will be called: Yahweh (God) is our righteousness.

Dear friends in Christ,

Have you been away from home too long? Being 8 and 14 hours away from our respective homes is rough...it'll be over a year to the next time I am at my childhood home. Perhaps, you too, know the feeling. It can be rough out there; sometimes it can even be rough at home. But deep inside of us all, we long for a home that is safe and sound, where we are loved, saved, and dwell securely.

Have you been away from home too long? Perhaps you have been away from your home with Christ. Being far from Him puts you in rough places. Perhaps you are lost in the darkness of your sin. Perhaps you have run away from home and are wandering around looking for a place to call home, but there isn't such a place. Or perhaps you've been blown away from home by a storm, much like Dorothy was and you have found the trouble of the wicked witch or the poppies that make you sleepy or the dark forest where so many unknown and scary things are. Perhaps the storm is a disease, a divorce, a death. Perhaps you are being lulled to sleep by the complacency of your faith or your own apathy. Or you are in the unknowns of life that are scary and cause you question your faith.

Dorothy woke up in a foreign land...imagine how she felt. Imagine how the folks from Jerusalem felt when they woke up in Babylon!! This wasn't an exotic vacation to see *The Hanging Gardens*; they were in exile...far away from home.

Yet for them, and for you, for us, God has provided a place, right here on earth, in space and time, where he calls us home. It's a place far greater than any capital city of the world. It's even greater than the most loving and safe home for any family and extended family. It's a place where true peace and justice, righteousness and salvation are to be found, to be give, to be shared. It is completely dependent on God, not on us, or on our efforts even to make the world a better, safer place.

You see, back then in the time of Jeremiah, God promised a king and a city that only he could provide. Yes, the king and city that his people had messed up had to be destroyed, but God found a way to punish sin and yet save his people. He promised a new and better king, of the house and lineage of David, but not just another David. He promised a new and better city, which would be called righteous. But note where the righteousness, justice, truth and peace are found: YAHWEH (God) is our righteousness.

You see, back then in the time of Jesus, there was one born of the house and lineage of David, to be a new and greater David, David's son, yes, but also David's Lord. And he came also to be the new and greater temple and city, where God would dwell on earth in the midst of his people.

And you see, right now, in these days of Advent preparation, we can celebrate, right here, right now, that we have a home. A city, if you will, a place to call home, where God is with us with an everlasting love. Call it church, call it our faith family, call it the Body of Christ, where both king and city come together in one person and in one place, where His body and blood are here for us to forgive, renew, empower us to be the place where God dwells out there in the world, for all.

It's here where we hear that King has arrived in the city...in order to be cast out of the city...on the back of a donkey to do the greatest thing ever...suffer, die, and rise for you and me.

Where do you live? Where do you call home? Where is a place for safety, security, salvation, and life? With all we will do in the weeks ahead, with overfilled schedules, both at home and in our various vocations in life, with an overabundance of shopping, baking, shopping, wrapping, and preparing coming and now here. Today, though, we step back on the first day of Advent to remember the anchor of our lives, our home with God in Jesus, in this place where He cares for us with forgiveness and life!

IN Jesus Name. Amen.

Now may the peace of God which passes all human understanding, guard your hearts and your minds and keep them focused in Christ Jesus our Lord and Savior. Amen.