

Home

A sermon preached by the Reverend Theodore S. Atkinson, minister, Oxford Presbyterian Church on the fifth Sunday of Easter, May 10, 1998. Scripture Lessons: Acts 11:1-18; Psalm 148; **Revelation 21:1-6**; John 13:31-35.

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER AND OF THE SON AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

Imprisoned on the island of Patmos for preaching Christ, John saw a vision of the future and God's final victory. In the midst of that vision he heard a ~~loud~~ loud voice saying "See, the home of God is among mortals."

Now it's hard for me to imagine a home without a mother. I'm reminded that ^{also} most single parent families are headed by women who are mothers. They make incredible sacrifices to make their house a home. Many widows are mothers who make their house or apartment their homes. I also understand that many homes don't have a mother. Homes are made up of all sorts of people. Men living together may make a home. Women living together may compose a home. Some people live at home by themselves. Some couples are childless. Some homes have a father and children but no mother. But, in my own experience, I find it difficult to imagine a home without a mother.

Throughout history great men and women have testified to the importance and influence of their mothers. ^{is making a house their home.} When C.S. Lewis, the English scholar and Christian, was only about eight years old his mother died. Her death had a profound influence on his life. He speaks of his mother's death as "the great loss which befell our family." He writes, "There came a night when I was ill and crying both with headache and toothache and distressed because my mother did not come to me. That was because she was ill too... ^(with cancer) and then my father, in tears, came into my room and began to try to convey to my terrified mind things it had never conceived

before." And after his mother died Lewis wrote: "Everything that had made the house a home had failed us." His mother was what made his house a home.

I think again of Winston Churchill, one of the greatest men of the twentieth century. Churchill was raised, not by his mother, but by a British Nanny, a woman named Mrs. Everest. In those days the job of bringing up children was delegated by parents to a nanny. Traditionally the British nanny enters the life of an infant when the baby is a month old. Churchill wrote of his nanny, "Mrs. Everest it was who looked after me and tended all my wants. It was to her I poured out my many troubles." Violet Bonham Carter, in her biography of Churchill, writes that, "Mrs. Everest was his comforter, his strength and stay, his one source of unflinching human understanding. She was the fireside at which he dried his tears and warmed his heart. She was the night light by his bed. She was security." Everything that a mother is, Mrs. Everest was. She made Winston Churchill's house a home for him.

I think also of the mother of the great Indian Christian, Sadhu Sundar Singh. Sundar Singh was born into a wealthy Sikh home. Sikhism is a religion that combines aspects of Islam with Hinduism. Sundar Singh often spoke of his love for his mother and how she made his house a home. She was a devout Sikh, not a Christian. But Sundar learned from her that religion was of supreme importance. He went with her to the temples and learned from her the meaning of reverence. It was a great disappointment to his mother when Sundar Singh became a Christian at the age of 15 and was baptized. Shortly thereafter he donned the saffron robe of a Sadhu, a Hindu holy man, and endeavored to present Christianity in a Hindu form. He traveled throughout India and as far as Afghanistan. On his final

missionary journey he traveled to Tibet where he was never again heard of. Sundar Singh's mother never became a Christian. On one occasion Sundar said, "If my mother should go to hell I shall ask God to send me there." Sundar Singh could not imagine heaven without his mother being there. Heaven would not be home without his mother.

But John of Patmos teaches us to think of God when we hear the word

"home". John, in his vision, inextricably links the idea of "home" with God. ... *And the God who makes a home among us has at least one very mother-like characteristic... wipe tears*
Whenever we speak of the end of history we have to speak in symbols. We make a *big* mistake if we take what John says literally. He's speaking in symbols. He's

trying to find words to describe what God's plan is for humanity. *God's final plan*
for humanity is to make his home among us and in our town. *Not otherworldly... but heaven came to earth... a renewed heaven on earth* John uses symbols

pointing us beyond themselves to a reality that we cannot begin to describe. And

yet Christians believe that the reality to which the home of God points is every bit as real as the town of Oxford.

When the Bible gives us glimpses of God's final victory at the end of history, it does so, not in order to satisfy our curiosity about the furniture of heaven and the temperature of hell. Rather, God gives us a vision of the future in order to effect the present. We all know how the *past* effects the present. But Christians believe that the *future* also effects the present. And the picture that John gives us of a new heaven and earth, of the holy city, and of God's home is meant to effect us now in the present.

One of Hollywood's favorite themes is the power of the future to change the present. For example, in Frank Capra's classic movie, *It's a Wonderful Life*,

Clarence the wingless angel shows George Bailey what the future would be like if he'd never been born. When George sees the future it changes his life. He's converted. He's given a new lease on life. ^{And} his new life changes the future. Of course, we don't take the movie literally but what the movie is saying is true. The future effects the present every bit as much as the past. And that's what John is trying to tell us when he describes God's victorious future and heard a loud voicing saying, "See, the home of God is among mortals."

What if we let that vision of the future effect the present? What if God made his home right here in Oxford. What if God were the one who made our ^{our} house a ^{his home} home? How would that affect the life of our community? How would that affect the way we work for our employers and the way we pay our employees? What if God moved in next door to you and you discovered that he was of another race and spoke a different language or was poor and uneducated?

What if God were a poor, homeless man or woman and needed a home? Would he be able to find a home in Oxford? Jesus once intimated that God does live in Oxford. God is a sick woman lying in the hospital. God is a transient spending the night in the lock-up. God is that eccentric, reclusive stranger who lives down the street, whom no one knows. God is the mother who goes to the Neighborhood Service center for clothes for her children. God lives incognito, now, in Oxford. And Jesus said that one day he will say, "I was hungry and you fed me, naked and you clothed me, a stranger and you took me in."

We often call churches, houses of God but the word John uses for "home" is not "church building." God's house is not a church. God's house is not a mansion.

God's house is not a palace. God's house is more like an apartment in the low rent district. When Martin Luther translated this particular word for "home" into German, he used the German word *hutte*, which means "hut". John tells us that at the end of history God will live among us, not in a mansion, not even in a church, but in a small, modest home expressing his solidarity with the places most people in the world call their home.

But what if, instead of waiting until the end of history we were to ask God to come to our house and make it his home today? Once God did make a hut in Galilee his home and lived among us. His mother was the Virgin Mary, pregnant and unmarried. The Word became flesh and made his home among us. We have stories of what happened. A village prostitute became one of the first preachers of the Gospel. A blind man was made to see. Crippled men and women were made well. Grieving parents received their sons and daughters back alive and well. And his miracles were hints that the promise was going to come true over all the earth.

Why not ask God to make your house his home today? Whether you're single or married, whether or not you're a father or a mother - We all need God to come to our house and make it his home. We don't have to wait to the end of history to see John's vision fulfilled. The future can change the present. Why not ask Jesus Christ to come into your heart and make your heart his home today?