

THE HOME OF GOD

Revelation 21:1-6

A sermon preached by the Reverend Theodore S. Atkinson
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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 voice say, "See, the home of God is among mortals."

It's hard for me to imagine a home without a mother. I'm reminded that most single parent families are headed by mothers who make incredible sacrifices to maintain a home. I also understand that many homes don't have a mother. Homes are made up of all sorts of people. Childless couples. Men living together. Women living together. People living alone, as well as homes made up of mother, father and child. But, in my own experience, I find it difficult to imagine a home without a mother.

Throughout history great men and women have found it impossible to write about their childhood home without reference to their mothers. In his autobiography C.S. Lewis wrote, "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... 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." After his mother died, Lewis wrote, "Everything that had made the house a home had failed us." His mother made his house a home.

The job of raising children in many British aristocratic families is delegated to a paid nanny. Winston Churchill was raised, not by his mother, but by his nanny, Mrs. Everest. Mrs. Everest came into the infant Winston's life when he was only a month old. She was the only mother Churchill ever really got to know. Churchill wrote, "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 wrote, "Mrs. Everest was his comforter, his strength and stay, his one source of unfailing 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 to Winston Churchill. When Churchill thought of home, he thought of Mrs. Everest.

Many of us have had our spiritual lives enriched and our knowledge of the Bible expanded through reading books by William Barclay, the Scottish Biblical scholar. He could not write about his early childhood home without saying of his mother, "She was the nearest approach to a saint I ever knew. She *was* a saint -- not just nearly one... above all she was kind, and, when all the guns were blazing at home, she was the buffer and the peace-maker between my father and me."

Robert Louis Stevenson, after he had received international accolades as a writer, was sitting in his childhood home turning over the pages of a scrap-book his mother had kept with notices about him in the papers and reviews of his books. A friend asked Stevenson, "Is fame all it's cracked up to be?" "Yes," he answered, "when I come home and see the pride on my mother's face."

All of this is to say that I find an inextricable link between the idea of "home" and the idea of "mother". But, in addition, St. John, links the idea of "mother" and "home" with the idea of "God". In his vision of heaven at the end of history he pictures a city where God lives, not in a palace or mansion, but in an ordinary home. And he pictures God, not as an oriental potentate reigning in supreme power, but as one who, mother like, wipes tears from his children's eyes. John writes in Revelation 21:3, "I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God... and I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'See, *the home of God is among mortals*. He will dwell with them as their God; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; *he will wipe every tear from their eyes.*'"

Who wiped the tears from your eyes when you were a child? John shows us that God is like a mother who wipes our tears. *Mother like He tends and spares us. Well our feeble frame He knows. In His hands He gently bears us, rescues us from all our foes.*

We often call churches, houses of God, but the word John uses for "home" is not "church building" or "holy dwelling place." When John refers to *home* he doesn't use the Greek word for *temple*, or *mansion*, or *palace*. The literal translation of the word John uses is *tent*. He likens the home of God to a middle eastern Bedouin tent. The same Greek word is used in the Gospel of John where he says of Jesus, "the word was made flesh and made his home with us." When Martin Luther translated this particular word for "home" into

German, he used the German word *hutte*, which is related to the English word *hut*. John wants us to imagine God's home with us at the end of history, not as a mansion or a palace or a church building, but as a small, modest home expressing God's solidarity with the places most people in the world call home. And he wants to envision a God with mother like qualities.

This is Mother's Day. It's impossible for me to think of home without a mother. John says that one day God will make his home among us and, like a mother, will wipe away every tear. I love that vision of God's final victory. But why wait for it to happen sometime in the distant future. Why not ask God to make your home, his home. Whether you're single or married. Whether you're a father or a mother. God wants to come to our homes. God wants to make our home his home. God wants us to feel as comfortable in his presence as we feel in the presence of those nearest and dearest to us, living with us in our homes. God wants to make our home a holy place. We don't have to wait to the end of history to see John's vision fulfilled. Ask Jesus Christ to come into your heart and make your heart his home today.

Let us pray: Let your peace and joy dwell in our homes, that our family life may be instructed by faith, sustained by prayer and governed by love. Strengthen us in our own baptism, that they may rejoice as children of God, and serve you faithfully, in the name of Jesus-Christ.