

Gray Weekly News



Week Leading to Sunday, June 26, 2022

Brought Home In The Spirit

By Bruce Prewer, www.umcdiscipleship.org

Growing up in a “parsonage family” as the child of a United Methodist pastor, home was often a contentious subject. When you itinerate as a family, you often have a different view of home than your peers who seem more settled. Add to all of that, we then had those later in life questions of how to care for aging parents who shouldn’t be left on their own any longer. So, for a time, we moved parents into our home. They didn’t like it.

My dad, the retired pastor especially. He put up with it for a while, but then began to grumble, almost daily. He wanted to go home. He wanted to get mom and take her home. He felt unmoored somehow, like he couldn’t figure out what to do with himself. He would stand in the middle of the kitchen, usually when my wife was trying to get a meal for us all; like he was trying to remember what he was going to do. Or maybe even who he used to be.

He just wanted to go home. Dad was a pastor and therefore moved around from place to place. But then he walked away from that itinerant life and settled down in a house that should have been bulldozed and rebuilt from scratch; instead, he worked on it piecemeal mostly on his own until it was almost livable. He was quite proud of it, to say the least.

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Third Sunday After Pentecost



2nd Kings 2:1-2, 6-14

Psalm 77

Luke 9:51-62

“Adventuring With God”

News and Notes

THIS WEEK

Sunday, June 26

Please join us on Sundays at 11 am. If you are unable to come in person, you can watch our livestream at graymemorialumc.org/facebook.com or graymemorialumc.org/youtube, at 11 am or any time after that at graymemorialumc.org/



If you have prayer requests, please contact Norma Adams, Jennifer Skinner or Gail Teems.

You may also call the church office at 850/385-6441 or send a text to 850/933-8469.

Prayer Requests

Sam and Norma Adams
Patsy and Betty
Sylvia Morrow
Jack, Randy, Jim & Jane Workman
Joyce and Bob

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And he wanted to go home. He didn't say it all the time, but it was there in the distant stare of his eyes, in the slump of his shoulders, in the inability to find anything to do.

Phillip Phillips has probably made a mint on the song called "Home." It was the theme song for the USA women's Olympic gymnastics team in 2012, and it had been used in every other commercial heard on TV for a while. They say he didn't like it at first and didn't want to sing it, mostly because it wasn't his song. He prefers the ones he writes himself, supposedly. But I think he has made his peace with this one. It has become his signature song. He probably will never do a concert and not sing "Home"; fans would demand their money back.

It is a good song, but it became a phenomenon. In an uncertain age, singing about home captured everyone's attention. It touched something deep within us—some longing, some hope that almost goes beyond words—home, family, roots, settling down, putting your feet up. Make yourself at home.

It's funny how Jesus seems so against all those things. Wait. What? Really? You'd think that he'd be in favor of that—of helping us to get home, of finding where we belong; finding where we relate, fit in, are known. Isn't he? Isn't that what this faith thing is all about? Finding ourselves? Arriving at home, at last?

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Well, you'd think so. And he does do all those things, will all those things for us. But his description of that is different from ours. His methodology of finding seems almost like losing. His depiction of arriving sounds more like journeying. We want to be settlers; he wants us to be pilgrims.

Sometimes even home isn't home. The unreachable destination, the unrealized dream, the undiscovered country. Are we supposed to feel sorry for him with that "foxes and birds" thing? Are we really supposed to leave our parents to deal with their own end-of-life issues? Are we really just supposed to slip away, rudely, as though the people who know us best aren't important enough to even bid farewell?

You know, this setting-the-face thing can be a real pain in the associations. The Samaritans didn't want to deal with him because of it. It ticked off the disciples too; they wanted to call down fire to burn them all up. Everyone seems to be a bit on edge in chapter nine of the Gospel of Luke. It's like everyone just needs to go home. Go home and settle down. Go home and calm yourself. Maybe if Jesus just lightened up a bit.

We don't like the edge Jesus puts on things at times. We don't like the demand part of the faith, the commitment part. We like the grace part, and we often interpret that as "anything goes, as long as your heart is in the right place." We like the "be like little children" command rather than the "be ye perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect." That must have been a bad day for Jesus. The folks who came alongside must have felt like they caught Jesus on a bad day.

Understandable, really, since he was heading to Jerusalem to die a difficult death, after all. So, we can forgive his curt responses, his heavy-handed demands. He was a man without a home, so he was anxious to get back to where he belonged, back into the arms of the Father. On the other hand, maybe he wasn't just short-tempered, caught in a bad moment. Maybe he knows something he desperately wants us to know. And that is that home is never found by standing still, or even less by going back. Who said that you can't go home again? It might as well have been Jesus. It is never back there. It is never found through nostalgia, through wishing that it was like the good old days that never were, except in our fractured memories.

The other thing he wants to tell us here is that home isn't a place as much as a relationship. The first eager follower would have been better to have simply said, "I will follow you." By adding in the "wherever you go," it became about the destination, not about the journey. I became about place and not about the commitment to follow the Word made flesh. The other two? They wanted a both/and. They wanted to follow but wanted to stay behind at the same time. They wanted to divide their focus, a little bit here and a little bit there. I want to follow, and will follow, but I've got responsibilities, so as soon as get my life under control, I'll be back. I've got lots of relationships; as soon as I get them in order, I'll be back.

I wonder if the second one had simply said, "Yes, I'll follow you," if Jesus would have sent him back to care for his father. Having made the commitment to be in relationship with Christ, then all our other relationships and responsibilities become even more vital, even more pressing. Because now it is in the light of Christ that we fulfill these other duties. It is in the light of Christ that we serve and love and create home. Home has always been a moveable feast. Not this place or that place, but the accommodation created when followers journey together for a time. There's no place like it.

But where is it? That might be the question that Elisha and Elijah seem to be wrestling with in our text from the Hebrew Scriptures. There is something going on here—something about wandering and something about going home, but it isn't quite clear which is which.

Surely you agree that there is some significant wandering going on in these verses. We start in Gilgal, head to Bethel, then over to Jericho, and then to the Jordan. That's quite a hike for a guy on his last day on earth! I heard a sermon once that counted the miles. From Gilgal to Bethel was seven miles. From Bethel to Jericho was eleven miles, and from Jericho to the Jordan was a mere five miles. All of which means that on Elijah's last day on earth, he wandered twenty-three miles. That's almost a marathon. Wow, pretty amazing really. But why?

Maybe it was just wandering. Maybe he was looking for a little alone time, a little "Elijah time." He did keep telling Elisha to stay behind. Some commentators say Elijah was testing Elisha to see if he would really go through with it. But I don't know. It seemed like Elisha was making a pest of himself and wouldn't give Elijah space. So, maybe he kept moving trying to shake the kid.

Or maybe there was a destination in mind. Gilgal: while there are many places with that name, and we can't always be sure which is referred to here; it was a place of remembering. There were standing stones set up there as a reminder of what God has done in our midst. So, from a place of remembering, Elijah headed to Bethel, the "house of God." This is the place where Jacob wrestled with the angel to receive a blessing. Then Jacob named it Bethel, perhaps thinking that he wrestled in God's living room. But it was a place full of the presence of God.

So, from a reminder of the Presence to a place where one wrestled with that Presence. From there he went to Jericho. We know Jericho, a place of victory, or walls falling down, and battles won. So, is this a place of triumph? Well, yes, but whose triumph? Remember the story of Jericho? Before the march and the trumpets and the urban renewal? Joshua stands on the brink of war, not sure he can win, but dedicated to the fight anyway. When, in the dark of the night, a warrior appears to him. And Joshua asks what any of us would have asked: "Friend or foe? Whose side are you on?" The warrior's answer? "Neither! I'm here as the commander of the Lord's army." Or as one commentator has noted, the warrior said, "I've not come to fight on either side, I've come to take over". And Joshua let him. Joshua falls on his face and says, "What does the Lord want from me?"

Jericho was a sign of triumph, but it was God's triumph and not ours. So, while a scene of victory, it is a victory that comes from surrender. It is pledging allegiance not to any earthly power, but to the Word of the Lord. So, from victory out of surrender, what might be left? Where else should we wander on our last day on earth? Well, nowhere else but the Jordan.

The Jordan is the river down by which we lay down our sword and shield. The Jordan is that barrier across which we look and see a band of angels coming to carry us home. The Jordan is the symbol of death and Resurrection in baptism, and it is the entrance into the Promised Land. Elijah wandered the route of the people of God, from awareness to contention toward surrender and victory and then came to the end in the Presence of the Kingdom.

It is the journey of our own life in faith. And we may at times find ourselves retracing our steps, revisiting different stages on the journey. But by the grace of God, and the mantle of our mentors in the faith, we will find our way in the end. We may be all over the map, but we do indeed have a destination. We're heading home, and home is where God is. Home is here and home is not here. Home is the relationships that we build with one another, but most important with God. We are brought home in the Spirit, the one who calls and the one who sends. Time to go home.

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UPCOMING EVENTS

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| Wednesday, June 22 | 7 pm | Bible Study with Todd Clark |
| Thursday, June 23 | 10 am 5:30 pm | Bible Study with John Rogers Choir Practice |
| Sunday, June 26 | 11 am | Worship Service |
| Tuesday, June 28 | 7 pm | Board of Trustees Meeting |
| Wednesday, June 29 | 7 pm | Bible Study with Todd Clark |
| Thursday, June 30 | 10 am 5:30 pm | Bible Study with John Rogers Choir Practice |
| Sunday, July 3 | 11 am | Worship Service |
| Monday, July 4 | | Independence Day Holiday |