

“JUST COME HOME”
Karen F. Bunnell
Elkton United Methodist Church
April 5, 2015

Easter Sunday
John 20:1-18

In just a little while, as soon as I say the final amen at the last service today, I'm taking off on vacation with my family to the Outer Banks of North Carolina. To say I'm looking forward to it is an understatement. It's always fun to go away, and it's especially always fun for me to go away with my family. When I do, I'm reminded of all of the times we went on vacation when I was growing up, and every time, every time we pulled back into the driveway at the end of the week, my father would say the very same words, “There's no place like home” – that wonderful line made famous in “The Wizard of Oz.”

My father was right, Dorothy was right – there is no place like home. It's where we're comfortable, it's where we find our center, it's where we're surrounded by people who love us, it's where we go to escape from the craziness of life – it's well, it's home. And you know what? It's not necessarily a physical place – it's a state of being where we are comfortable, we are at peace, we are loved.

Home. Oh, so many people are searching for home. The great writer Ernest Hemingway once told the story of a Spanish boy named Paco and his father. Paco and his father had a great huge argument and became estranged, and after a while, it got to be too much for his father, so he went to the local newspaper and put an ad in it, which read like this: Paco, meet me at the Hotel Montana at noon on Tuesday. All is forgiven! Love, Papa”

Paco is a very popular name in Spain – and when the father went to the hotel on noon at Tuesday, there were hundreds of young men named Paco there waiting for their forgiving fathers – searching for home, if you will.

The great preacher and professor Tom Long could tell you about others searching for home. He came upon a chapel once with a life-size rendering of Jesus, with a sign in front of it bearing the scripture: “Come to me all who are weak and heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” Twelve chairs were arranged in a semi-circle in front of the it for people to sit and pray. Each of the chairs had a sign on it bearing the name of a disciple. Dr. Long was struck by the fact that one chair, among all the chairs, showed the signs of most frequent use, and it was the one marked “Judas.” Searching for home . . .

Pastor Kyle Idleman tells about a friend of his who went off to study at Colorado State University and ended up majoring in partying. He got into all sorts of trouble, was flunking out, was at the end of his rope, and finally, he picked up the telephone to confess it all to his parents. He didn't know what they would say, and he wouldn't blame them for cutting him off entirely. Instead, what he heard from them was three words – not “I love you,” but “just come home.” (The Easter Experience DVD, Kyle Idleman, City on a Hill Productions)

Just come home. Oh, how we all long to be home, in that place of peace, where we are loved, and where we know all will be well.

Mary Magdalene longed for that on the first Easter morning. She was as far from home at that moment that she could be. The morning was dark and dreary, and so was her spirit. She had just been through the worst week of her life. She had watched Jesus - the man who had literally changed the course of her life, the man who had saved her, the man who set her free from demons – be arrested, tried, beaten, scourged, and humiliated. She walked with his mother along the way of the cross, as beaten almost to the point of death, still Jesus had to carry that cross on his back to Calvary. She had cringed as they drove spikes into his wrists and feet, and hung him up on that cross. She heard the horrible taunting of the crowds. She watched as he drew his last breath, and as they took his body down and buried it in a tomb.

It was too much – and now she was empty, dry, desolate, despairing, hopeless and homeless. Jesus, who had been the center of her being, her home, was dead and gone.

Numbly, Mary made her way to the tomb. She needed to be there, needed to be near him, needed to tend to his body. Anything would be better than sitting with the others, grieving.

But when she drew near to the tomb, she got the shock of her life. The great, huge stone had been rolled away, and when she looked inside, she discovered, to her horror, that Jesus' body was no longer there, and the bottom fell out. Just when she thought things could not get worse, they had. This story of horror seemed to have no end. Now, they've taken away his body – could they not let him rest in peace?

She has to do something, so she runs and gets two of Jesus' disciples – Peter and John. She tells them what she has seen, and the three of them run back to the tomb. The men look into the tomb, see what they see, and then they leave. But Mary can't make herself move. She's rooted to the spot. Her grief seems to have rendered her almost paralyzed.

Suddenly, angels appear and ask her why she's weeping? She tells them why she's crying, and then she turns around and sees someone else – a man, who she assumes is the gardener. He asks her the same thing, "Why are you weeping?" and again, she tells him that someone has taken the body of her Lord, and if it was him, could he please tell her where the body is?"

And then, the man says one word, her name, "Mary." And as he does, Mary's eyes are opened, and she sees that it's Jesus himself, standing right there in front of her, alive! Alive! This man who was once dead – she had seen it happen with her very own eyes – was alive, and standing in front of her! This man, whose body had been wrapped in cloth and laid in the tomb – she had seen it with her very own eyes – was standing right in front of her, alive!

And in that moment, everything changed – everything. Despair gave way to hope, darkness was overcome by light, sorrow became joy. And Mary was home again!

And when Jesus told her to go and tell others about it, she ran as fast as her feet would take her, and tell others she did – with joy and exuberance and excitement – wanting them to know that everything was new, everything was now possible, because Jesus had defeated death, that He was alive! For the rest of her life, Mary Magdalene was telling others about Jesus' resurrection, telling them, like those parents of that college student told him, "Just come home. Just come home. Christ is alive! All is well, and all will yet be well."

Oh friends, so many people in our world need to hear the good news that we're remembering today. So many people need to know about the power of God's love that conquers all, even death! So many people need to know that there is nothing to ultimately fear ever again, and that you never need to be lost and alone, away from home. Because Christ is risen, He is alive, and He is here – always and forever!

Maybe you are someone who needs to hear it today. Maybe your heart has been broken by the death of someone you love. Or maybe you're worried to death about a loved one who is addicted. Maybe you have had your life shattered by the end of a relationship, or the sudden loss of your job. Or maybe you've gotten word of a bad medical diagnosis. Maybe you are someone who needs to hear the good news of Easter today. Maybe you are feeling lost, without a home right now.

If you are, let me remind you of how much God loves you, how much God cares for you, and to what lengths God will go for you, by way of a story. I watched a video on-line this week, that I will never forget. It was a video from the aftermath of a building collapse of some kind. I'm not sure if it was because of the tragedy of an earthquake or the tragedy of terrorism, all I know is that the first thing I saw in

the video was a bunch of men digging frantically in the dust and rubble of a collapsed building. They were hauling away great huge chunks of concrete with great effort. They were all scrambling frantically to clear away the rubble. They kept digging and digging and digging – in a panic. And then, I saw it – the top of a baby’s head – way underneath the rubble. They kept digging and digging, all the while carefully clearing away the baby’s face, and clearly his path to air.

They kept digging and digging, and after awhile they freed his little arms, and his hands went right up to his eyes and were wiping them. Still the rest of his body was still stuck.

The men kept digging and digging, and it was soon apparent that he was really, really trapped, so they covered his little face, and began using picks to chop away the big pieces of concrete around him. They chopped and they chopped, and little by little, they got the stones out of the way, and finally, finally, one leg became free. I was holding my breath watching this – it was incredible.

But still, he was stuck because his other leg just wouldn’t come free. And now, some of the loose debris was beginning to fall into the holes they had made around his little body. So they desperately shoveled away that dirt with their hands to keep him from getting buried again – all the while trying to get the other leg freed.

I was exhausted just watching it. On one side of his body, they were scooping away dirt – on the other side, hacking away at the boulder that held him captive – and there he was in the middle of them all – his little tiny hands up against his face. Finally, blessedly, in a moment I shall never forget, they moved a great huge stone, and his leg was free – and they lifted this tiny little soul up to freedom – and then the men fell exhausted on the ground.

Now, why did I share that? Because I think that’s a beautiful picture of the kind of love that God the Father has for all of us – a love that never lets us go, a love that digs and digs and digs to get us out of the burden of our sins and shortcomings, a love so deep that Jesus gave up his life on a cross for us. A love that in so many ways calls us home again and again and again!

So today, on this Easter Sunday, just come home! Just come home to the embrace of a love that will not let you go! Just come home to a love that went to a cross that you might have life and have it more abundantly! Just come home to a love that defeats death, and evil and all things that would take away life! Just come home and rest in the arms of our risen Christ, and know that all is well, and all will yet be well!

Just come home, for Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! And all is well.
Thanks be to God.

Amen.