

## **Home Away from Home**

Rev. John Allen

If my daughter finds one of those little white clover flowers growing in our lawn, she will —without fail— pick it... and then eat it immediately.

Thankfully though, after a many months of chasing her around trying to keep her from choking on any number of household objects, those flowers are the only thing left that she immediately puts in her mouth.

Everything else gets a slightly different treatment.

Familiar objects are gleefully introduced to anyone who will listen by name.

Rock, truck, duck.

But beyond the things she knows, and the clover flowers which she instantly consumes, everything else gets treated with curiosity.

With wondering.

Held up, turned around, shown to everyone nearby, let's see how far I can throw it. Or how it feels if I press it against the side of my head.

I try to imagine what the world must seem like to her, with the vast majority of objects around her still without a name attached to them, without a category, or a function.

A world of immense possibility and wonder.

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This morning's reading comes from the early days of King David's reign as the King of Israel, probably about 1000 years before the birth of Christ.

Up until this moment all of Israel has been nomads, landless, wandering, first out of Egypt, then around the wilderness.

At last they have settled in a home, Jerusalem.

And they built David a pretty nice, spacious, palace. A solid home built of fine cedar wood. A place to settle in and stretch out a bit.

And once David is settled in his new home, he has a sudden and slightly embarrassing realization.

God is still living in a tent.

At that time the Israelites believed that this tabernacle, a simple tent enclosing the ark of the covenant, also contained the very presence of God. It was seen, quite literally, as a house for God.

And sitting beside David's new fine cedar palace, the little tent, flapping in the dessert winds, suddenly seems an unfitting home for the almighty.

David wants to remedy this promptly so he calls the prophet Nathan and lets him know his concern: "here I am in a house of cedar, and the ark of God is in a tent." Implying rather strongly the need to build an equally suitable home for God.

Nathan says, "do what you are going to do."

But then the voice of God arises in Nathan's heart with a rather pointed question:

"Did I ask you to build me a house?"

And then a reminder:

"I have been with you wherever you have gone."

God doest want the house. God likes the tent, just fine.

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Now of course, God's presence does not actually physically dwell in a tent. But the image is important.

God is telling the people, quite literally, don't put me in a box. I belong out in world.

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I love our church building, and I think that sacred architecture is an important art form that serves as a sort of constant center to reminder and refocus. This room draws my sprit heavenward, deepens my prayer, and feels like home.

But, there is a danger also to having these sacred spaces set apart. And that is the danger of coming to feel like God is only here. In this time. In this place.

God is here. In this time. In this place.

But God will not be trapped in this box. God would rather set up a camp in our backyards and byways, where we work, where we play, where we live.

God goes with us, wherever we go.

God is just as much at home, away from the homes we make for God.

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There is traditionally a boundary between what is sacred and what is secular, what is holy and what is ordinary.

Certain places are sacred, other places are ordinary.

Certain songs are sacred, others are secular.

Certain time is sacred, other is just regular life.

What would happen if we got rid of that boundary?

What would happen if we didn't try to contain God's presence to certain times and places, but looked for the inspiration of the Spirit and presence of God everywhere?

We are going to explore that together.

Matthew's music will invite us to find the way that God's presence and truth can be found in unexpected melodies and poetry.

I am going to do some sermon series this year looking at secular literature and culture and exploring it through the lens of our faith.

Beginning on September 22, I will start a series of sermons on the lessons in faith found in the PBS staple of my childhood, Mr. Rodgers Neighborhood.

We will resume our series of Monday Moments, inviting church members to share how their faith is a part of their weekday life.

We will continue to be inspired by the way that God is present to us in the midst of what we ordinarily think of as sacred.

And we will seek together to find God's presence out in the world, sometimes in the places we would least expect.

We have a saying in the United Church of Christ. We say that "God is still speaking." Which means that we not only listen for God's voice in

the sources of scripture and tradition, but we seek God's continuing revelation to us in the world today.

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And perhaps the very best way to do this would be to imitate the littlest disciples in our midst. People like my daughter. And the other newest members of this body of Christ.

Pick everything up with a sense of wonder.

Don't eat it.

But, take time to examine the familiar and the unfamiliar things of your life to see what holiness they hold.

Pick everything up with a sense of wonder, and show it to anyone who will look.

See how it feels to hold it close.

Not just the stuff you can hold in your hand.

And also, not just the stuff that is beautiful, or easy. Most of us are pretty good at experiencing God in a sunset, or while we are holding a new new child.

And if we are asked to name where we see God in the world beyond these walls, most of our first thoughts would be beautiful places and lovely moments.

But God is at home in the midst of all that life brings. God's presence is there too when we are overcome with sorrow. When we are lost. Angry. Or alone.

So this invitation to pick everything up with a sense of wonder, and a heart seeking the holy.

It is also an invitation to hold hard things in a new way.

Maybe pick up grief and turn it over to see if there is something holy shining through it.

Or think back on a moment of crisis, through whom did God care for you in the midst of that moment?

What love has tragedy brought forth from humanity.

What zeal has injustice inspired.

What hope have we mustered out of the darkest moments?

Bring a memory back to the front of your mind, and look again, where was God?

Not every single thing is going to hold some new profound wisdom or revelation.

But I suspect that for every one of us, there is something of God hiding in plain sight in our lives. There is some place where God's still speaking voice is striving to break through.

We just haven't noticed.

At least.

Not yet.

