

Column

Home is where the heart is . . . so it has been said. It is also the place of comfortable slippers, a favourite chair, a neighbour's dog scratching at the door wanting to come in and a more or less predictable routine.

I am thinking of home today, as July has found me away more than present. First, there were two weeks in England where I was privileged to attend a conference in Oxford. Then, almost immediately following, I was off to a clergy meeting near Nashville, Tenn. Now, at last, I am home, hopefully to stay for a while.

Home, both the word and concept, is very evocative. For one thing, it prompts (or at least ought to) thankfulness. Not everyone, after all, has a home or one that is secure and peaceable. I recently viewed a documentary highlighting the problem of homelessness in Seattle, San Francisco and other of our major cities. There, multitudes of sad souls live on the streets, sleeping in boxes or other makeshift dwellings, often without sanitary facilities. Sidewalks and parks have become places of unimaginable filth and degradation, haunts of wretchedness and hopelessness.

Such images prompt questions as to why such situations exist and what can be done about them. Supplying needles and not addressing the problem of drug abuse and mental illness, as this documentary made clear, is not working. Former great cities are dying and, more tragically still, people are dying.

Such sights, whether seen in person or on screen, remind us that there are many dark places in our world where not only physical intervention is needed, but ultimately the light of the Gospel of Christ. Such scenes should cause us not to take our own homes for granted. If we have a place to return each day, a safe and peaceable habitation, we have a blessing of great value, one for which we need to give thanks to God.

This concept of home calls for a second response: to look beyond the physical structure where we live at the present, to a future yet unseen. Allow me to explain. I once visited an elderly woman in hospital who kept calling out, "I want to go home." Her daughter straightened her pillow and tried to make her comfortable, but nothing availed. She continued to make this request.

Finally, her daughter asked her, “Mother, do you want to go to our house or Jesus’?” Well, she didn’t know. She just wanted to go home.

This elderly woman’s longing for home connects with words found in Hebrews 13:14, “Here we have no continuing city, but we seek one to come”. All that is lovely and satisfying about our present dwelling will be there waiting for us on the other side of the river.

How do we know? We have the promise of the One whose words were validated with action, who rose from the dead, the Lord Jesus Himself. “I go to prepare a place for you” (John 14:2), He told His disciples on the eve of His crucifixion.

Jesus’ words continue to console and cheer today. They give confidence in the present and hope for a future yet unseen. I think it is fair to say: Home is not just where the heart is, but where Jesus is.

O GOD, whose never-failing providence ordereth all things both in heaven and earth; We humbly beseech thee to put away from us all hurtful things, and to give us those things which are profitable for us; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (Collect for the Eighth Sunday after Trinity, Book of Common Prayer)

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