

“There’s No Place Like Home”

1st Pres San Bernardino **Joshua 24:1-3a, 14-18, Jn 14:23**
Rev. Dr. Sandra R. Tice

11/9/08 Stewardship

Chloe Cousineau is one of our smaller members- she is just 4 years old. Her mom Amy is currently serving on our Session. Amy and Mark bought a new home several months ago, so their family could move down the hill from Wrightwood and into a new house in Highland. In the process, there was an in-between day when Amy put Chloe to bed in this brand new house- which as yet did not have all of their furniture or personal belongings in it. Amy tucked her in, and Chloe turned to her mom. “Mommy?” She said, **“Where is home?”**

What a great question.

It is, at its core, a question we all need the answer to. Where is our ‘safe place’, our ‘shelter’? Where is the place we return to and dwell? Where is the place where our life is centered, where we can restore our strength and remember Who we are?

We, like all human beings, are created by God with a Longing for home.

There is a way in which THIS place is Home for us- Homecoming on Reformation Sunday, for example, where people return and celebrate. I know I have a sense of Homecoming as I return to this pulpit- BTW- I hope I do not sound like some sort of *blatherskite* going on and on and spewing nonsense, but my friends in FOC have wanted to improve the quality of sermons, and so have provided me a list of recommended words to use, some of which I am incorporating today.

Like ‘*blatherskite*’.

As I was saying:

This is a place that has welcomed us, a place where we have experienced the Presence of the Holy One.

But when the Committee selected this theme for Stewardship this year, they were not suggesting that somehow there is no place as good as this place, that in some sort of *topsyturveydom* God actually dwells here more than in any other place..

They were not trying to suggest that if we click our heels together 3 times, we will have everything we need for stewardship...

Home is something that we who follow Christ have glimpsed- a gift we are invited to SHARE. Home is a gift we are invited to share with all who are homesick, or longing for home.

This place is a spiritual home- we work together to create a place of beauty and shelter, full of music and color and human warmth, with places and occasions to pause and Listen for the God who meets us here. This welcoming space is not just for us, but for all who find their way here- for a memorial service, a wedding, food distribution, or worship. (for example: the sister who works at St.B’s and visited me in the hospital, who was blessed when she visited First Pres for Bill Leonard’s service.)

This place is a Home, and sometimes we know it. But sometimes, in worship as in life, we go thru the motions. We do things- even precious things or holy things- on auto pilot sometimes.

Sometimes- I admit it- when I kiss the people dearest to me (Tom and Bethany) I am distracted, and I go thru the motions as if I were putting on socks or washing dishes. Yet if I had only 3 minutes left to live, I would spend them kissing these two goodbye...

Perhaps you know what I mean- sometimes, we go thru the motions-

but sometimes the reality is clear to us, and we know it deep in our bones.

That's what happened when I returned from my vacation this summer, I had a powerful experience of that veil of 'going through the motions' being lifted off as we were doing the offering. Though I often do it on 'autopilot', I suddenly had the experience of

Knowing I was receiving Holy gifts.

I looked in the basket and suddenly knew that I was looking at part of the allowance of some of our students, part of the work of your hands and minds and hearts, envelopes containing part of a pension or retirement income-

And as we sang the doxology, my eyes filled with tears-

Because God is the one from whom all blessings flow, and I was holding a basket of blessings that you were ready to share.

Here in my hands was evidence of the Spirit still at work among us,

Here was investment in the work of God in this place and time

Here was evidence that I do not do this ministry alone- that it belongs to all of us,

This basket was full, and in my minds eye I could see it becoming blessings,

I could see it becoming Home: food for the hungry and pastoral care for those in pain, hospitality for the weary and music for the heavy of heart. I suddenly understood that I held in my hands a **basketful of healing and learning and comfort and compassion and joy.**

A basket we had filled together. And I knew for a second the gladness that I ought to feel every single week when I engage in this privilege.

You might say I recognized your *eleemosynary*. {eli MAH synary} Or, if you were not trying to impress teenagers, you might just say the power of your charity- of giving.

We are worried about things financial these days, and rightly so: we have never been here before, and it is a scary place to be. All across our nation and our world are signs of grave recession and predictions of gloom and misery.

But I am not worried about our Stewardship campaign. I am sure that there are those who rely on investment income who will need to scale back what they are able to do.

Heck, my husband said to me that WE might not be able to pay the full amount of our 2008 Lot of Work pledge before Dec 31, as we have some unexpected medical bills- these things happen to us ALL.

But God will put it on the hearts of others to do more- to go up a percentage point or two.

God will inspire them, and they will be startled at how glad they are to do it.

There will be more than enough.

My parents were born in '32 and '33.

They knew some things about abundance and about want that my generation and those behind me do not know. (though I suspect we are about to learn..)

They knew something about Home and about need and about their power to make a difference in someone else's life.

For every giver that we lose in that generation, people who study these things say that we need btwn 6 and 7 of my generation to replace them. We have lots to learn about giving.

Here is a spiritual lesson God has been trying to teach me since I arrived here: **There is enough! There is plenty!**

When I had been here just 6 months, and it was the season to emphasize stewardship, I was terrified. I had no experience running a stewardship campaign, and no idea how to do it. I was given kind coaching and substantial practical help from Paul Mordy, but I **was still afraid there would not be enough.**

And people increased the amount they pledged that year (over the year before) 15% (which is unheard of in churches)

Last year, I was afraid again- after all, I was no longer the new pastor, perhaps the first year had been a fluke. And the pledges came in: 10% over the previous year!!

And then Bill Leonard, at a stewardship meeting, brought to our attention that it was high time we re-paved the parking lot, and that we ought to do a capital campaign. He was right, of course. It was agreed that we had a LOT of work to do around here: painting and paving and repairs- and that we would need to try. **You would think that I would have learned, by this time, that there is a trend here-** but in fact, I was AFRAID that we were biting off more than we could chew. The committee agreed to do the campaign *in the summer* (when the received wisdom is everyone is on vacation and attendance is down and no one is paying attention), and *while I was gone!* (well, I thought, at least they can't blame me if it doesn't go well). And in 4 weeks, with no pastor, in the dead of summer, in a year when you had *already* increased pledges, you raised \$100,000!!

And, I'm ashamed to say, I am still not convinced,

I'm still sometimes afraid there is not enough, though God keeps showing me that there is!

I've heard myself say: "I am afraid we are not 'ready'" (whatever THAT means!)

...to expand Adult Education on Sundays.

We may not be 'ready' yet to welcome kids into worship.

We may not be 'ready' to launch a youth mission trip or an adult mission trip or to take the financial risk of calling an associate pastor....

I stew, and I fret, and I worry.

And EVERY time I find myself in fear, much to my surprise and delight, there is more than enough generosity, enough talent, enough leadership, enough energy, & enough money- to do the New Thing that God has set before us.

Every time.

Because this is how God works.

And it seems to me, as I pray, that I hear a great, deep, gentle, chuckling.

God has given us all the resources we need

To do the things God wants us to do.

And this year's stewardship season will be no exception.

Like Joshua, We cannot chose the era in which we live, or what social and cultural victories or suffering we will face. We cannot choose the state of our national or global economy. **But we can choose, this day, whom we will serve: the fear of scarcity, Or God's promise of abundance.**

We can choose, whatever our circumstances, to be generous with what we have, to be people who relieve suffering and create hope and make the love of God tangible and concrete in a scary and frightened world.

We can choose to be part of what God is doing in the world, in seasons of uncertainty as well as in seasons of plenty. There will be enough

Let me tell you one more story, just *colloquially*:

I worried not only about my body,

but about this church family and about my own family when I embarked on this journey to the hospital. What happens when you leave a church without a pastor?

What happens when you leave a family without a mom?

Will the ministry go on? Will people remember to live the gospel?

Will my family manage to feed themselves when I can't shop and cook?

The second morning in the hospital, Tom came to visit looking dejected.

What is it? I asked.

"Well", he said, "I'm not managing very well as house-husband.

I put Bethany to bed, and I tidied the kitchen, and I fell in bed exhausted myself, but when I got up this morning, I realized that the refrigerator door had been open a crack all night long."

"But it's not entirely my fault!" he said, "There is so much food that the congregation has brought us, that I can't close the refrigerator door!"

There is enough.

God has provided abundance, and you know something about incredible generosity, and there will be enough!

Where is home? It is where we experience the presence of the One who is always with us, rather than going through the motions.

It is where we gather the abundance God offers us and fill plates full of healing and learning and comfort and compassion and joy.

It is where we realize that it is nearly impossible to close the refrigerator door.

It is right here, right now.

Amen.