

“Memories of Home”

Based on John 14:23-29

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Rev. Dr. Kevin Orr

What are your favorite memories of your childhood home? I remember the huge bonfires we would have in our backyard when my dad would burn up brush and branches that had fallen down over the past several months. He would get wood piled up, wad up a bunch of newspapers, douse it all with gasoline and throw a match on top. Poof! Instant blaze! And then in the evening we would roast hotdogs and marshmallows. And of course there was Christmas morning, when my sister and I would wake up while it was still dark and run down the stairs to mom and dad’s room to wake them up so that we could get to unwrapping those presents. Then there were the times where my sister and I would try to make each other laugh while drinking milk so that the milk would come out through our noses.

What have you carried with you from your childhood home? What are the traditions, the routines, the things you do that turn a house into a home for you? For me it has always been having a big bookshelf full of books and a chair to sit in to read them. Our house had floor to ceiling shelves all along the south wall of the living room and it was stuffed with books. Every evening my dad sat in his green upholstered lazy boy with the built in heating pad and massage settings, reading the paper or reading a book. I don’t have the lazy boy yet, or the floor to ceiling bookshelves. But I have the books. I don’t have the same size of garden that my mom maintained and I don’t have the asparagus bushes my mom grew. But I have a little patch in the backyard to grow some tomatoes and some peppers. It wouldn’t be home without at least a little garden.

Memories of our childhood homes live with us. If I invited you to close your eyes and bring back those memories you would recall the smells, the creaky sounds, the laughter, the arguments, the adventures, that took place in your childhood home. Memories can be such a gift for us. They help us overcome geography and time, putting us back where we can re-live our experiences. I know not all memories are pleasant,

nor should all memories be re-lived. Some need to be locked away. But the good memories, the ones that give us life and joy, what a treasure to bring those back up from the storehouse of memory. They help remind us where we came from, how our childhood homes helped to shape who we have become.

My parents have been gone for many years. But I still sense their presence through memory. They rarely told me and my sister that they loved us, but we never doubted their love. I still feel their love for me. And I still embody how I was raised by my mom and dad. How we are raised sticks with us. Obviously we aren't carbon copies of our parents. And not everything our parents did or raised us to believe do we want to emulate or carry forward. Nobody's parents are perfect. But they leave a mark on us nonetheless. You and I will always be products of our childhood homes.

All this talk about home and how home life shapes us into the people we become, I think, is something that Jesus is trying to tell his disciples as he prepares them for his departure. As I said last week, these next few sermons are coming from what is often called Jesus' farewell discourse. The hour had come for Jesus to be betrayed, sentenced and crucified. This is his last chance to prepare his disciples for life without him. I know, Jesus will talk to his disciples off and on after his resurrection. For forty days he pops in and out of their lives until finally he ascends. But the way John has his gospel set up, he has Jesus giving the substance of his message to the disciples just before the betrayal in the garden. This is the meat of John's gospel. So everything here is pointing to the future, what lies ahead for these disciples in a world that does not get Jesus and what he's about.

So Jesus says to his disciples that if they keep the words of the Father that Jesus has spoken to them, then he and the Father will make their home with them. Maybe another way to put it is if the disciples live together as a community in the ways that Jesus taught them to live, then it will feel like home to the Father and the Son. In a spiritual sense the Father and Son will know that they are home when they are with the disciples. And for the disciples, having the Father and the Son living with them will make their community feel like home. After all, they are

a family, are they not? Jesus once said that those who do the will of the Father are his brother, sister and mother. So when the disciples live together as family, it will feel like home. And there is comfort in that. This home is not a physical structure. This home is not comprised of blood relation. This home is a band of people who love each other and who seek to live their lives in obedience to God's will and with faith in God's presence and power. This home that Jesus is talking about is church.

What else does Jesus say? He says that the Spirit will remind them of the things that Jesus has said to them. This is where memory comes in. As the disciples live their life together, now and again they will say things like, "Hey, remember when Jesus said..." or "Hey, remember that one time when Jesus did...". That's the Spirit prompting those memories, bringing up their experiences of Jesus and the things he said. The Spirit helps keep those memories alive and effective in shaping their life together. Eventually some would get around to writing all that stuff down. But in the beginning it was friends sitting around the table swapping stories of their adventures with Jesus. I can imagine in the sharing of those stories there would have been some laughter. Maybe some feelings of regret, of wishing they would have had more faith or had responded to Jesus in a different way. There would be nodding in agreement and an appreciation for the wisdom that Jesus had given them. Maybe even a shed tear every now and then. It is in the telling of those stories, as the Spirit brings them to mind, that the disciples sense the presence of Jesus in their midst, as well as the Father who sent him and told him what to say and do. Sitting around and telling those stories...it would have felt like home.

What else did Jesus say? He said, "My peace I give to you." Another way to say "give" here is "bequeath" as in a will. Jesus is giving the disciples something of himself. It isn't some general feeling or abstract concept. If peace was a substance, a part of Jesus' heart, that's what he is bequeathing to them. It is a possession that he wants them to have before he ascends back to his Father.

Those of us who have lost our parents are recipients of our parent's last will and testament. You may or may not have gotten money or a

house or property. You likely got stuff. Maybe it was china, or jewelry, artwork, an angel collection, books. You received tangible things that belonged to your parents that you now have in your home. They are treasures. Priceless. You see these items and it brings back the memory of your mom and dad.

Well, Jesus didn't bequeath any objects to the disciples. It is possible that Jesus had nothing tangible to give them. The soldiers at the foot of the cross got his clothes. Other than that, we have no knowledge that Jesus had any earthly possessions. But Jesus did bequeath to the disciples his peace. He did not give them stuff, like how the world gives. He gave them a part of his heart. He gave them the capacity to be assured that no matter how crazy it got, no matter how uncertain and difficult, that the one who could still the stormy winds and waves is the one who walks with them no matter what. So do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid, Jesus says. The peace that stilled the storm he gives to them. What a precious gift, to make use of the peace of Jesus in the storms of life, to have the ability to be still and to know the presence of God just as the Son knows the presence of the Father. What a gift to know that our lives are held in the palm of God's hand. What a sense of security and assurance in the midst of the stormy blast.

The things that Jesus said to the disciples were meant for us as well. We are also a community of disciples of Jesus. We live our life together as church. And as we do, the Father and the Son are at home with us. Our life together as community is like home for God and Jesus. And the church, this community, is our spiritual home. God and Jesus really do live with us in a spiritual sense. When we are in church, in community, we are at home. As Dorothy said in the Wizard of Oz, there's no place like home. How good it is for us to live together as a community of faith, where we are at home with each other.

We live in times of uncertainty and change. The world has changed so much in just twenty years. When we look into the future, many of us worry about what our kids and grandkids may have to contend with: global terrorism, the proliferation of nuclear weapons, a warming planet and rising oceans, the potential for outbreaks of pandemics. What are the outcomes of the hyperconnected world we live in, where increasingly

every part of our daily life requires interaction with computers and the internet? Will the United Methodist Church exist in fifty years? Or even ten years? What the future holds for us will certainly be a mix of amazing triumph and mind-blowing discovery along with unimaginable suffering and destruction, as it has always been.

But whatever the future may bring us, this we know. We have a community that we can call home. Not a building. Not a piece of real estate. A community, where God and Jesus have taken residence. And our community is just one little room in a vast city, this city where God dwells. So let us remember that whenever we gather in the name of Jesus we are at home, among family. And with whatever we are going through, with this family, we will be ok.