

“THERE’S NO PLACE LIKE HOME”

II Samuel 7: 1-14a

Psalm 23

Mark 6: 30-34, 53-56

*I will appoint a place for my people Israel and will plant them, so that they may live in their own place, and be disturbed no more;*

A couple of weeks ago on Facebook – and oddly again just this past Friday – there was a post from a friend that asked the question: “What is the scariest movie you have ever seen?” The post from this past Friday refined the question somewhat by asking “what is the scariest movie you ever saw as a child?”

(You all have yours, I imagine)

I saw there the answers I had rather expected.

The Shining

Wait Until Dark

Texas Chainsaw Massacre

Nightmare on Elm Street

Psycho

The Exorcist

Old Yeller

But there was one that appeared from many folks that kind of caught me off guard:

***The Wizard of Oz***

I suppose that flight of deranged monkeys (FLY MY PRETTIES, FLY) simply terrified so many.

It never scared me. The special effects – eh – too easy to see through for my 8-year-old sophistication.

What I DO remember most about The Wizard of Oz is Dorothy – Ruby Red Slippers on, eyes closed, repeating over and over again... “There’s no place like home, There’s no place like home, There’s no place like home” It is an indelible image for me.

I suspect that the reason was that we moved a lot when I was a kid... by fourth grade I was probably in seven schools... HOME was not a real permanent thing for me. It kept changing. It never settled. Was never quite secure. So... Dorothy’s words stuck with me. Not the monkeys.

There’s no place like home.

Since that first FB post I have watched any number of old classic movies... and it is startling how many of them deal with going home.

Gone with the Wind... TARA

ET... ET phone home

Apollo 13: Hanks.. “Gentlemen, what are your intentions? I want to go home.”

Going Home. There it is safe. There one belongs. It is stable. Warm. Nurturing.

‘Home is the place where, when you have to go there,  
They have to take you in.’

The Death of the Hired Man: Robert Frost

It is the place of last resort. They HAVE to take you in.

There's no place like home.

The Bible is all about going home.

And so, the vagabond God of the Hebrews, the migrating God of the Wandering Aramean, the God of the 40 years of roaming in the wilderness, the God of the rain that fell for forty days and forty nights...

The God who kept his promise to bring his children home to a land flowing with milk and honey... today makes another great promise:

*I will appoint a place for my people Israel and will plant them, so that they may live in their own place, and be disturbed no more;*

Certainly, this is to be for the Children of Abraham, but just as certainly it is to be true for all of God's children.

The children of God shall have a home... established by God for all of God's children – AND even for the sojourner in the land. Permanence. Peace. Security. The things that make for life. God takes care of God's children first, as a Good Shepherd does.

One of the great themes of the Bible is that God establishes a home for the children of God. The first home is Eden, of course. And in all the time the children spend slogging through an endless chain of wildernesses, the vision is always to find again their own home, led there by the God of grace.

Part of that promise is to enter the future Kingdom of God.

The 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalmist: I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

Jesus: "I go and prepare a place for you, and if I go and prepare a place for you I will come again and receive you to myself, so that where I am, you may be also".

But a huge part of that is the promise of a place to live that is one's own home. A place. To belong. To matter. Name on the mailbox. Where life can flourish. And families are raised.

The human hunger for a home and hearth is deep rooted; it comes from God. It is expressed in the holy books of every culture and in every age of which I am aware. It is in our art and literature. It is in our music. It is in our lore. Norman Rockwell made a serious living defining the American home. And not all that long from now we will once again hear the strains of "I'll be home for Christmas."

That God's children shall have a place is bedrock Judeo-Christianity. The Shepherd ultimately leads us home, to safety. Affirming that we matter. That we "take up space" in God's plan.

One of the most enduring images I have from several visits to the nation of Jordan is watching a Bedouin shepherd return his flock from the fields to their sheltered home, and then to lay himself down across the entrance to their sheepfold – a living gate of protection for the sheep – literally laying down his life for the sheep. To secure their home. Such is the promise of a place.

Of course, today the quest for a home, a place - it is in our headlines. The reality of our present world is that there are millions who walk daily through the Valley of the Shadow of Death with no home in sight, millions who simply have no place to call home. They are the displaced of the world, pressed against the borders of refuge. They are the homeless of our streets.

The United Nations Refugee agency claims that there are over 68 million people who have been forcibly displaced from what they had called home. Over 25 million are refugees. Over 3 million are seeking asylum from violence.

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development released its annual Point in Time count this past December, a report that showed nearly 554,000 homeless people across the country during local tallies conducted in January. That figure is up nearly 1 percent from 2016.

The scale of this beggars the imagination.

This Is not a localized problem; it is worldwide. All over the world there are children of God who have been driven from their homes and are now adrift and without shelter of their own. Norman Rockwell never painted this picture.

These merely seek a home, like any child of God might expect to have. And it is one of the hottest issues on every continent. I certainly is here at home.

For the people of faith, who worship a God who promises a place for all, what is it that we are to do?

You know... I have no idea. Anyone who suggests a simple answer to this is being disingenuous.

BUT, as the people of The Book, I am certain that one thing we CAN do is to bring the perspective of the Good Shepherd to bear in how we think about and act upon what we see. We need to be mindful that the Good Shepherd numbers the refugee amongst His flock, too.

One thing I am sure of is that in dealing with the refugee and homeless, CRUELTY must have no place in our thoughts and actions.

One thing of which I am sure is that the Good Shepherd would want us to act in His Incarnational stead. In the words of our youth, WWJD: What Would Jesus Do?

One thing of which I am sure is that we are called to be generous to those who find themselves desperate, as God has been to us.

One thing I am sure of is that as the desperate walk the Valley of the Shadow of Death, we should not be one of the evils of which they need be afraid. The God of Grace should not have to protect them from *us*!

One thing I am sure of is that there is no place like home. And that the Shepherd would have all home for a secure night's rest.

Towards that end may we all actively engage our lives.

In Jesus' holy name.

May we too be shepherds of God's children.