

FROM BEAR CREEK UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

A Place to Call Home

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John 4:1-16

September 11, 2005

I would scold you but I don't really know many of you well enough. That could be my fault but then many of you just haven't been very regular this summer. You have had company or you have gone traveling, or there is some other excuse you make. I am not scolding any of you, but is there no shame in you? It is just a question.

I admit to not being guiltless. I missed most of my first three weeks her. But I do have reasons, good reasons for it. This summer I had to take Vickie camping and to see Vancouver, B.C. She insisted that I charter a sailboat and take an instructor onboard. For the sake of harmony I relented, I complied. I would have been here, but you see it is all Vickie's fault. So I do not scold you. I understand the problem.

In truth, I understand this summer need of folks in the Northwest to be gone. There is so much beauty around us it would be sacrilegious to let the mountains, streams and rivers go unvisited and untasted. There is much to see and do before winter's wet grey returns. And because school is out it would be unloving not to visit family and friends. So you sojourners travel with my blessing.

But it is also true that you are missed. It is not the same worship without you. And small groups suffer when their numbers dwindle with summer absences. And since we miss you, we are glad you have come home to Bear Creek, and we welcome you home. We even have a party set out for you in the Narthex and hope you will stay and enjoy it. For some reason we have used a football term "Kick Off" with a cowboy decorations. We have mixed football games and rodeos. Families are like that.

I want to add a third metaphor to the mix; that of home. For most of us football games and rodeos are spectator sports; events in which we watch someone else be engaged. But being home is not a spectator sport; it is the real thing, our real lives. And home is where our hearts are broken and healed.

The woman at the well is homeless. Oh, she has a house to go to but it is not a home. She has been moving from house to house and relationship to relationship never finding a home. Jesus offers her a home that will quench her wandering thirst. Jesus offers her a place to rest and call home.

You don't have to study psychology to know that each of us needs a place to call home. We need some place and some people we can call our place and our people; a home where the furniture feels familiar and the conversation is relaxed. We need a place and people where our memories of love are held in time and space; a place where we have learned and lived the values we

hold to our heart. We need a home that will guide our purpose in the world and enable us to bring love near and take it far. And we need a place and people to whom we can come when we are bone weary and need rest. We need a home to which we come for love.

I already know that I have such a home at Bear Creek. And I don't say this just because you pay me money and let me live in the parsonage, though I am very appreciative of both. I say it because my soul has been nurtured and cared for greatly in the two months I have been here. You are a loving and gracious people and I thank the Bishop for sending me to you.

I also know that not everyone has a place to call home. It is sad to me, and a great challenge to us, that this is true. I want everyone to have what I have in the love of God here with you. I want to open and share my home so others will also have a home.

In the Bear Creek area 45% of the adults and children have no faith home, and 24% have a minimal relationship with a faith home.¹ Together, that is 20,000 people who don't have what I have in you. And if we include the greater Bear Creek area that number grows to 35,000 children and adults. That is a lot of people who have no one with whom they regularly worship or pray; who have no one to hold them to God in study, no place where they are unconditionally loved, or through whom they serve the world with God's love.

In today's scripture Jesus is talking about hospitality. It is a generous hospitality that sees each person as a valued guest, regardless of their gender, their age, their economic or political status, their past, present, or any of the world's other definitions of how friendly a place and people should be. Jesus says to the woman, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life." Hospitality is this simple, it is giving water when water is needed.

But again, not everyone has someone who will offer them a glass of cold, clean water. It is literally true that the hospitality of water is not yet available to everyone, even in Bear Creek. God has called us together to offer water to a thirsty world. We are home for those who are thirsty to death; to those that have no one to say, "Here, drink this, it will fill you;" to those who have no place to call home.

I think of some of the students Vickie's has taught. While she was a first grade teacher there were children that literally had no home. They lived in the garages of friends or relatives,

¹ based on a study done Percept Group. Inc. for Bear Creek in 1998

in vans, or wherever they could find. For various reasons, they had no place or people offering safety or shelter. Many of them have an understanding and experience of love that is malformed. These are children without a home and I wish they had a Bear Creek to love them. Many of you know such homeless children.

It is sad to me that not everyone has a home for body and for soul. It is sadder to me that not everyone knows such a home exists for them. They stand on a ground full of holy water and they die of thirst. I grieve for Vickie's children. I grieve for those who seek love in all the wrong places hoping to find living water in the bar or the casino, or the wrong person. I grieve for those who are so dry inside that love no longer seems real. I grieve because there are those with no place to call home.

Yet as I grieve, I also rejoice. I am glad for those of us who can call this place home. Some of us have memories of a child baptized, confirmed or perhaps married here. Some of us have memories of ones gone before us and whose lives have been celebrated and who in death have been resurrected. Some of us have wept for our own soul and found solace here. Some of us have met for years with the same small group of believers offering care and receiving care through life's joys and sufferings. We know how much power to mend souls this home possesses.

And you don't have to be real old to call this home. I think of our youth and how they hold each other through middle school and high school. I think of their Chrysalis weekends of love, the stories of camp and special events that make Bear Creek their home. I think of Jamie's and Jesse's compassionate rummage sale for the Wilson family. And I remember those who helped raise over \$4,000. I remember Sonja lying on the floor exhausted and Ann leaning wearily on a table. Truly all of you who contributed, worked and shopped made this a richer filled with compassion.

I am also glad for those of you who call this place home because of the part you play in healing the world. This home offers space and people for counseling and synagogue. Several of you have been and continue to be active with Tent City. Many of you have gone on Mission Trips to extend home in far away places. And whatever disaster strikes we know that our Bear Creek home is generous to help. We are now preparing Health Kits and Hurricane buckets for the victims of Katrina.

And though only 13 years old, this home has already made stands for justice. When human rights are threatened this Bear Creek home is among the first to react. In our home we are making a home for everyone, transforming the world by the love of God. I am glad there are those of you who with me call this place home.

Some of you here today may be looking for a place to call home. I pray you find it. I know it doesn't have to be Bear Creek. God is not limited to one home per village. I know that we at Bear Creek want for you to find a home and we will help you find that home here or wherever. What we know is that our lives are richer because we worship, study and serve with this part of God's family. And what we believe is that if you worship, study and serve with us, you too will find this place a home for body and soul. We pray for you as we pray for ourselves, that Bear Creek be a place to call home, a place all of us regularly encounter the hospitality of God; a place where everyone can worship God, pray and sing to God, and meet with a small group that will pray with us and for us.

I also know that all of us here today know some of the 35,000 folks around us who have no such soul home. They are our family, friends or acquaintances who in time will look for their own place to call home. I ask that you consider offering a cold, clean cup of water to them by inviting them here and helping them stay here until they find their own rhythm of worship, small group life and service.

When Jesus spoke the words of receiving, words of hospitality and home, he was envisioning a transformation of the world. He saw by the love of God what was possible for us all; that in our receiving of each other, we would receive him, we would receive God, and we would receive graceful lives of great joy. In every heart is a longing for a people and a place to call home. Jesus saw that we could be that people and that place. We are making this Jesus' vision come true right here and right now. We are a place to call home. Welcome home my family.

Now after we dine at the Lord's Table you are invited to the "Kick Off" rodeo style.

Amen and Shalom.