

# Sermon for Sunday, December 10, 2017 - “Homecoming”

Second Sunday of Advent  
December 10, 2017  
Good Shepherd Lutheran Church  
Decorah, Iowa  
Rev. Amy Zalk Larson

[Click here to read scripture passages for the day.](#)

Beloved of God, grace to you and peace from the One who is, who was and who is to come. Amen.

This time of year, our hearts often turn toward home - whatever home means for us. We long to be with loved ones. We long to feel at home in the places we live and we want those places to feel cozy and welcoming. As winter presses in, we crave warmth, love and connection. It is a season that calls us home.

This time in the church year also speaks of home. In Advent, we prepare for God to come in the flesh, to make a home among us. We look toward the end of time when we're promised that God will make a home among mortals and dwell among us. Then all people will be at home in God, all people will know God's peace and well-being. Advent calls us home.

Yet, this is also a season in which we're often painfully aware of how we and others are so very far from home in the fullest sense of the word. We are so far from the peace, harmony, well-being we seek. Physical and emotional distances feel magnified this time of year, as does grief and heartache. As winter sets in, we become more aware of those who have no homes and those whose homes are unsafe for whatever reason. When we see all the injustice and brokenness around us, we see how far we are from God's dream for our world, from how things will be when God makes a home among us.

As the Advent season calls us home, it also serves to highlight the many ways we are living in exile - cut off from our true home in God, from the well-being God longs for us all to know.

Exile was also the reality for God's people at the time of the prophet Isaiah, the reality addressed in our first reading today. The people turned away from God so God gave them up to their chosen separation and exile. They were conquered by the Babylonian Empire. The city of Jerusalem and their holy temple were destroyed. The people were taken into exile in Babylon. They were so very far from home and felt cut off from God.

At first, God's people lamented and cried out to God to bring them home. But after some time in exile, many of them assimilated into life in Babylon. They grew comfortable and prosperous. They let go of longing for something different, of yearning for home. The way home was perilous, risky and uncertain and many of them chose to remain in Babylon even after they were free to leave. Their complacency kept them stuck in exile.

Other exiles resisted assimilation but lived with only anger and despair. They knew they didn't want to go along with a conquering, oppressive power but they'd lost hope that things could ever change. The temple had been destroyed, God must have failed. Their despair and despondency led them to remain in Babylon rather than set out on a difficult journey home.

In our day, in our own sense of exile, we often respond in similar ways. Yet our complacency and our despondent anger only serve to deepen the exile. We end up even further from God and our true home.

With so many obstacles within and around us, how will we find our way to well-being, peace, harmony? How we will find our way home?

The good news announced by the prophet Isaiah, the good news announced by John the Baptist, the good news for us today is that God finds us. God comes to us.

The prophet Isaiah tells us who live in exile, then and now, "here is your God ... See he comes with might, he will gather the lambs in his arms, and carry them in his bosom, and gently lead the mother sheep." God comes to lead us home.

We don't have to get out of our complacency or despair on our own, we don't have to find our way home through the wilderness. God overcomes all obstacles, within and without - every valley shall be lifted up, every mountain and hill be made low, the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain.

Isaiah tells us that God comes through the desert on a highway. In Babylon, highways were used by the people to carry their gods to the temples, to try to assert their superiority. Throughout the ancient world, highways were also used by kings and armies to conquer, display their might and acquire goods, people and power. God's promises in Isaiah draw on that imagery - God will make a way through the desert, God will display glory and power. Yet God will do this not to conquer but to bring us home. God uses the image of the dominant culture of the time and reframes it to speak hope.

In Isaiah's day, God led the people home and their exile ended. Yet, eventually the oppressive Roman Empire claimed power over them and the people knew exile again. It was into that exile that John the Baptist spoke announcing the good news of Jesus.

Ultimately, until the day when God makes a home among mortals, we will always have some sense of being exiles. Until that day we will not fully know the peace and well-being God longs for us to know. Yet it is not up to us to find our way home; we are not alone on this journey. God has come to us in Jesus, in Jesus who comes to us again today in his body and blood. We can live as people of hope in the midst of exile, following God's ways of justice and mercy, resisting complacency and despair. We can live in trust that God has come among us; we are not alone. We can live in joyful expectation that God is leading us to our full and ultimate home.

Let's take a moment for silent prayer.