

# Sermon for Sunday, December 10, 2023

Second Sunday of Advent

“Homecoming”

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

Beloved People of God, grace to you and peace in the name of Jesus. Amen.

This time of year our hearts often turn toward home - whatever home means for us. As winter presses in, we tend to crave warmth and coziness, love and connection. This is a season that calls us home.

This time in the church year, Advent, is also a homecoming. We prepare our hearts, homes, and houses of worship for Jesus to be born again and live among us. We also look toward the end of time when God will make a home among mortals, when all creation will know God's peace and well-being - God's dream for the world. Advent calls us home to this hope, this promise, home to God.

Yet this time of year also reveals that we are all so very far from home, in the fullest sense of that word. We're so far from the deep peace and harmony and well-being that we all need. Physical and emotional distances can feel magnified in December, as can grief and heartache. As winter sets in, we're more aware of those who are unhoused and those whose houses are unsafe for whatever reason. That's especially true this year amid the ravages of war and climate disasters.

Even as Advent calls us home, it also serves to highlight the many ways we're living in exile, cut off from our true home in God, from the life God longs for us all to know. Our first reading today, from the prophet Isaiah, speaks to that sense of exile. The people had turned away from God, so God had given them up to their chosen separation. They were conquered by the Babylonian Empire and sent into exile in Babylon. The city of Jerusalem and their holy temple were destroyed. The people were so very far from home and felt cut off from God.

How do you live and hope and pray when God and home feel so distant? At first the people dreamed of home and longed to return. But eventually many assimilated to life in Babylon. They grew comfortable and prosperous. They let go of hoping for something different, of yearning for home. The way back was perilous - full of rough places, uneven ground, valleys and hills. So, many of them chose to remain in Babylon even after they were free to leave. Their complacency kept them stuck in exile.

It's easy for us to respond in similar ways - to be so shaped by the culture around us rather than God's dreams, God's kingdom.<sup>1</sup> Scholar Walter Bruggeman describes some ways we assimilate. Our identity and values become defined by how much and what we consume and where we stand on a few political hot button topics. We set our hopes on the rise of the stock market. We fill our ears with the constant cycle of “breaking news” rather than the words of God's good news.

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<sup>1</sup> Walter Bruggemann, *Cadences of Home: Preaching Among Exiles*, Westminster John Knox press, 1997, pg. 116f.

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

What response do you notice in yourself in the face of all that is wrong in this world? Complacency? Anger? Despair? Maybe all of the above and all before coffee? In our scriptures today, God speaks to all these responses within us. God speaks through a voice crying in the wilderness saying to us, to you, "I have made way when it seems there is no way. I come to you even when you are stuck in complacency and despair."

God's Word clears obstacles and births faith in human hearts.

God's Word stands when everything else crumbles.

God's Word of conviction and comfort leads us home through the wilderness, leads us to keep hoping, praying and working for the day when God's dream will be a reality for all creation.

The Word of God is the mother tongue of our homeland. Just as immigrants speak their native language to feel closer to their home, as we follow God through the wilderness, we're reminded to return to our native tongue - to speak and sing of God's goodness, God's power, God's love and justice, God's dreams - so that we will not forget. These words and songs empower us to defy the powers of this world that seek to define us. Using the language of faith, praise, worship and prayer helps us to resist complacency and despair, to envision and then live another reality.

During Advent, we're reminded of our status as exiles and our longing for home. This helps to stay uncomfortable with the status quo, to not assimilate into the values of the dominant culture. And yet as we reflect on this exile, we do so as people of hope, expecting, trusting, that things will be different.

God has made a way for us in Jesus.

God is here to lead us and all creation home.

Let's join in a moment of silent prayer and reflection.