

A Sermon by the Reverend Timothy A. R. Cole

The Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost



9 September 2018

Proverbs 22:1-2, 8-9, 22-23

Psalm 125

James 2:1-10, [11-13], 14-17

Mark 7:24-37

Well, I am conscious today that it is exactly 2 years since I first stood in this pulpit, and on this Homecoming Sunday, I realize that the Cole family this is now home for us. Scotland is still where we are from, but it is no longer our home. This is home.

Thinking of finding a home away from your roots, I am reminded of the English officer who once said to me when, one day in London, I was waxing lyrical about Scotland, "You jocks are all the same. You love Scotland. You just don't want to live there!"

It occurs to me that we might also say "We Washingtonians are all the same. We love Washington but we only want to spend half the year here!"

But it is wonderful to see the Christ Church family fully assembled once again.

[10.00am] It's great to see so many youngsters here too.

Paper bag. What's in this bag?

A tube of glue.

Glue - Fixes things, sticks things together - Here in the Church, God fixes us, and binds us together. We have all been different places this summer, but now we are back together again, and the Christ Church family is reunited. Apart, we can do lots of things, but together, God makes us able to do so much more.

A Birthday Card that, when opened, a butterfly driven by a wound up elastic band flies out.

The butterfly flew because in it there is a rubber band that was twisted round and round like a spring.

Here in the Church, God presses us together in love and praise, prayer and friendship, thinking and learning so that, when we open the church doors, 500 butterflies go shooting out into the world to do his will, to do good things.]

Homecoming is about coming home but, I realize that it is more complicated than that.

It is about coming home but it is also about going back to work from school to college. I still remember the day I went to college for the first time. What an adventure that was! The first time you live away from home in a new place.

I like the story of the Scottish student from the Highlands, Donald MacDonald, who goes off to be a first-year student at an English university and is living in the hall of residence. After he had been there a month, his mother came to visit him, carrying reinforcements of haggis and oatmeal. "And how do you find the English students, Donald?" she asked. "Mother", he replied, "they're such terribly loud people! The one on that side keeps banging against the wall and won't stop. The one on the other side screams and curses away into the night!" "Oh, Donald! However do you manage to put up with these awful noisy English neighbors?" "Mother, I do nothing, I just ignore them! All I do sit here quietly minding my own business and playing my bagpipes."

Home is our base. It is what we know. It is the familiar we return to. It is, for the lucky of us at least, where love is to be found. It's where our identity begins; where we know who we really are. It is safety; a castle for our hearts, and, again if we are lucky, a place of rest and peace.

Yet when we talk about Homecoming here today we are really talking about home, not so much as our refuge, but as the center of our lives activity; our study; our work; our relationships.

Our homes are what we go out to meet the challenges of the world. It is only by doing so that we make our homes what they are. It's how we put bread on the table, pay the mortgage or the rent, and put in our homes the things that make them beautiful and ours; pictures and ornaments and things of meaning to us.

Christ Church is our spiritual home, and at its heart, is Christ. Here we know who we are. Here we are fed. Here our wounds are bound up. Here we are known and loved by God and by, in as much as our poor hearts allow, each other. Here we are strong and safe.

In today's readings, I think we have two things to help us in our homecoming.

First, there is the wonderful story of the Syrophenician woman who goes out from her home, leaving her very sick child, to seek the help of this foreign preacher she has heard about. She is taking a risk. She is leaving her sick child at home and she knows this man she seeks is a Jew and that the Jews call her people "dogs" because her people have occupied the coast that Jews believe really belongs to their country, Israel. The woman seeks Jesus out and, no doubt had to push past a wall of disapproval to get anywhere near him. In her desperation she falls at Jesus' feet, and asks him, begs him, to help her daughter.

Jesus is not initially inclined to help her. "Let the children be fed first, for it is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs." But she answered him, "Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs." Then he said to her, "For saying that, you may go—the demon has left your daughter." So she went home, found the child lying on the bed, and the demon gone."

There are many lessons to be taken from this powerful encounter, but for us today, we might take this one. This is our spiritual home. It is this place that we leave our homes to come to in order to seek the only one that can really help us. We know we are not worthy of him but, like the woman, we are prepared to come anyway. It is humbling and embarrassing to admit to ourselves that we need something; that our lives, however perfect they may appear on the surface, are not perfect. So we come and we say, as the Prayer of Humble Access that is inspired by this very reading says;

"We do not presume to come to this thy Table, O merciful Lord, trusting in our own righteousness, but in thy manifold and great mercies. We are not worthy so much as to gather up the crumbs under thy Table."

Christ is our home. We find him here. And he feeds us despite of who and what we are.

Secondly though, in our Epistle reading, James reminds that we don't just come here to be healed, and fed, and to have our faith strengthened.

“What good is it, my brothers and sisters, he says, if you say you have faith but do not have works? Can faith save you? If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, and one of you says to them, “Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill,” and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.”

We are the blessed ones, the ones whom God has blessed with so much. But he does not bless us for anything. In as much as we are blessed, so we are sent out from here to bless. Here God fixes us and glues us together with his spirit and his love, but here he also makes us into a great coiled spring, so that when the doors are opened we are released by this faith into our lives to use our time our talents and our money in his service. The Syrophoenician woman goes home to find her child well. We go home to find our lives better for being with Christ. Now we are home, what shall do with what God has given us?

Amen.



CHRIST CHURCH GEORGETOWN

31st and O Streets, NW
Washington, DC 20007 | 202.333.6677
www.christchurchgeorgetown.org
info@christchurchgeorgetown.org

The Rev. Timothy A. R. Cole, Rector
The Rev. Elizabeth F. Keeler, Asst. to the Rector
The Rev. Elizabeth B. Gardner, Asst. to the Rector
The Rev. Nicholas J. Evancho, Deacon & Seminarian