

“Homeless”

Rev. Chip Blackshear

First Presbyterian Church of Corpus Christi, Texas

Genesis 3:1-24

September 23, 2012

Where is home for you? When you think of the word “home,” what comes to mind? For many of us our childhood home, the place where we grew up, is the picture we have in our minds of home. If your childhood was one filled with love and acceptance, then your childhood home becomes your pattern for the ideal home. It’s the place to which many of us spend the rest of our lives trying to return. That image of home shapes our lives and our future as we try to recreate it. One of our biggest struggles when we finally get out on our own is trying to recreate that ideal home that we remember. Somehow our efforts never seem to capture the feeling of *home*.

Of course not everyone has those sorts of warm memories of home. Sadly, for many people, home is the place from which they are trying to escape. For them, home brings up memories of pain or discouragement or abuse. Chances are, however, that even if your memories of home are not pleasant you have a mental image of what home *should be*. We all have an idea of the perfect home and most of us are aware that we don’t have the perfect home. We spend the rest of our lives searching for home.

The thing is, “the real home for which we are searching isn’t the place where we grew up or even the new place we’re hoping to build, but the place where we were created to live – paradise.” So how did we end up this way – restless, confused, and homeless? Well it all goes back to the beginning. Genesis 3 begins with the first humans, Adam and Eve, living in perfect harmony with each other, with nature and with God.

But then things went terribly wrong. As the story goes, the serpent came by one day and began to plant seeds of doubt in the minds of the humans. He said, “Did God really say, ‘you shall not eat of any tree of the garden?’” He then said, “You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and

you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” The way out of paradise always begins by doubting God’s Word.

In the Bible, especially in the Old Testament, the word “know” can be used in several ways. One of the ways we can interpret “to know” would be “to have mastery over.” So when the serpent says, “when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil,” the temptation is for the humans to gain for themselves the prerogative of determining what was good and what was evil, putting themselves in the place of God. I’m just glad that doesn’t happen today!

It’s important for us to realize here that in Eden, in paradise, perfection didn’t mean that we had everything. God left some things off limits. But we didn’t see it that way. How could this be paradise if we don’t have it all? Instead of trusting in God and being dependent upon our Creator, who alone is whole and complete, we try to take control. We are convinced that we *deserve* to have it all. And so we keep believing that the next thing we reach for will make us complete – the next job, the next house, the next car, the next drink, the next wife. What we’re really reaching for, however, is to return to home, to paradise.

As a result of their disobedience, Adam and Eve are thrown out of the Garden of Eden. From this point on life will be hard. Verse 24 says that the LORD placed the angel and the flaming sword at the East gate to guard the entrance. Wherever Adam and Eve were going to go, it wasn’t back into the garden. Only then do they realize that they were living in Paradise. Life would now be lived somewhere East of Eden, but they would always remember home.

It’s that same memory of Eden, imprinted on every one of our souls, that makes us discontented with the place where we are. No matter how nice our houses and community are, it’s not paradise. Pastor and author Craig Barnes

puts it this way: “We weren’t created to roam about the earth lost and confused. We were created to live at home with God, which is what defines paradise.”

One of the problems of our society today is that we have claimed that we are free to create our own identities. Unlike our ancestors, who generally went into the same line of work as their parents, today we are supposed to “discover” what we are to become. If you’re not happy with your life, then you are “free” to discover a new one. But along with throwing out our inherited identity we have also thrown out the God who was at the center of that identity.

One day Jesus told a parable about a young man who was not satisfied with life at home. He wanted more. So he went to his father and asked for his half of the inheritance. In that culture it was like he was saying, “I can’t wait for you to die. I wish you were dead now.” But for some reason the father gave the son the money and off he went.

We don’t know where he went and it doesn’t matter. The story simply tells us he went to a far country. Far from the father’s house. It didn’t take long for this far away place to use up the young man and spit him out. He found himself feeding pigs and wishing he could eat with them. As one author put it, “that’s a hard way for a Jewish boy to hit bottom.” But then an amazing thing happens. The young man remembers his father’s house. He remembers home. That memory of home is enough to set him on the path back to where he belongs.

Many people today find themselves trapped in a far country. They have wandered from God and spend their lives searching for what’s missing in their lives, searching for home. Barnes calls these people “nomads.” They have enough memory of “home” to keep them dissatisfied with where they are but not enough to get them there. It turns out that they aren’t really free at all. They are slaves to this search for what’s missing.

What we’re missing is the image of God that’s inside each one of us. You and I are created in the image of God. His divine image is stamped on each of us. But in our search to create our own meaning for our lives we have

buried God’s image, separating ourselves from Him. When that happens it becomes harder for us to hear His voice calling us back home.

Rather than needing to “recreate” ourselves into something new, however, we find that going home – where the Father is – begins with the memory of the Father’s house. In other words, heaven doesn’t mean that we become something different, it means that we become the true version of ourselves. We become the person that God created us to be from the beginning.

So how do we find home? How do we go from being nomads wandering from place to place to being pilgrims on the journey back home? The first step is to realize that we are lost. As our reading from Hebrews 11 says, we are “strangers and exiles on the earth.” It’s only when we know and admit that we are lost that we wait and hope for a Savior to lead us home. “Only then can we make use of the means of grace God provides to begin our pilgrimage home.”

The second step to returning home to the presence of God is accepting forgiveness. “Guilt is the great universal disease of the soul.” Guilt is what caused Adam and Eve to hide from God. Guilt is what made them try to blame someone else for their own sin. Guilt is what got them thrown out of paradise. The only cure for guilt is forgiveness. In Jesus Christ God not only comes to show us the way back home, he also forgives us, wiping away our guilt and restoring our identity as sons and daughters of God.

The final step is to understand that this world is not our home. As we saw in Hebrews, we are strangers and exiles. We desire a better country, a heavenly one. There is, however, a place where we can experience a little bit of that better country, and that place is worship. Worship is that place that connects this crazy, chaotic world to our true home. People know this instinctively. In the weeks and months after the September 11 attacks in 2001, people filled the pews of churches like never before. When the world didn’t make sense what people wanted most of all was to worship.

Tim Keller, pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in New York City has said, “we are more wicked than we ever dared believe, but more loved and accepted in Christ than we ever dared hope — at the very same time.” When we come to realize how lost we are and how forgiven we are in Christ, we can’t help but worship. It’s in worship that we renew our longing for our true home and we are reminded that Jesus doesn’t just tell us how to get home, he comes and takes us there himself.

Amen