

## Coming home

Psalm 90:1; Jeremiah 29:1-14; 2 Corinthians 5:1-9  
August 7, 2005

Just about sixty hours ago, on Thursday evening at 10:00 pm, Lynne and I arrived home. We had been away from home for twenty-six days. We had driven over 5300 miles, passed through eighteen states and two Canadian provinces, slept six nights in a tent, and spent other nights in at least seven different beds in five different states. But Thursday night we were home and we slept in our own bed! But I have to tell you: all the time we were away, it didn't feel like "away." Many places felt like home ...

On one beautiful Maine summer day, Lynne and I were paddling our kayaks among the islands off Stonington harbor. The air was dry and clear, the water cold, the land and waterscapes stunning. We saw porpoises and huge starfish; we watched lobster boats and sailboats. And Lynne asked me: *Now do you feel like you're on vacation?* But I didn't. I didn't feel like I was on vacation, taking a "time out" from my "real" life. I felt like this was my real life! I had come home!

We spent eleven or twelve days with my Mom in Blue Hill, Maine, and that felt like home, too ... reconnecting with her, doing jobs for her around the house, sharing ideas and feelings and memories.

When we were with Lynne's folks in Cedarville, Michigan, that felt like home. And when we stayed a night with my sister who lives in Hamilton, Massachusetts, in the house my family moved to when I was eighteen, the memories of that house and that town made both Lynne and I feel like we had stepped through a time warp.

We attended church a couple of Sundays while we were away -- at a Baptist church in South Berwick, Maine, pastored by a young man who was a member of my youth group fifteen or more years ago, and at the Episcopal church in Blue Hill my mother attends. And in both churches -- each so different from each other and each so different from this church -- as I sang the songs and listened to the scriptures and tasted the communion bread and wine, I felt at home.

Because home is not really this church or that church, this place or that place. Home is where God is: *O Lord, you have always been our home!* God is in all of these places. God has visited me in all of these places. And God visited me again in each of these places.

If the Lord is our home, think of what that means! Any place can be home. You can be at home anywhere.

(Read Jeremiah 29:1-14)

Remarkable! Even the place of exile, the land of the hated enemy, the place of disappointment and despair, can be home! Jeremiah writes a letter to Jewish exiles in Babylon, reminding them of God's promise to return them one day to their homeland, but in the meanwhile, Jeremiah urges them to live there, in Babylon, with passion and purpose and joy ... *as if* they were home. No, it is stronger than that! Not just *as if* they were home -- but there, in Babylon, they *are* home, because even there, the Lord is with them!

You can be at home anywhere, even when it doesn't feel like home ...

Sometimes that happens: a place that was home changes so much that it doesn't quite feel like home anymore. The school you attended is no longer there, the corn field you remember is a housing complex. The church service just isn't like it used to be and you don't know half the songs they sing now. It just doesn't feel like home anymore.

But it is! It is home, because the Lord is there. It's not about finding the right place, the right church. It's not about keeping things the way they have always been. It's about living with joy in the place you are, because the Lord is there with you. So settle down and make yourself at home. Enjoy yourself, right where you are!

Even in the place of suffering ...

Maybe you are sick and you don't feel at home in your body anymore, or maybe things are not working for you and you don't feel at home in your life anymore. But you are home -- right where you are -- because the Lord is there with you. Maybe things will get better and maybe they won't, but in either case, you may live with joy and with hope because the Lord is there with you and will never leave you.

Even in the place of grief ...

You are lonely and your evenings are often filled with tears, ever since he died. Ever since she died, it just doesn't feel like home anymore, because she made it home. But it is still home, because the Lord is our home. You live with joy for all that the Lord has given you, and you live with joy for all that the Lord will yet give you. Because *whether we live or whether we die, we belong to the Lord*. So you and she, you and he, belong to the Lord, and in belonging to the Lord still belong to each other. You are home.

Even in death ...

Death is ultimate homelessness. In death, you are nothing, you are nowhere, you are with no one. Death draws a line which none may cross ... except the Lord.

(Read 2 Corinthians 5:1-9)

Even in death we will have a home! In death, we will have the home we have been waiting for all our lives! Because death doesn't win, God does. Death "thinks" to take us into exile forever, but God brings us out of death into life to be with him forever.

And in the meanwhile, while we still live, wherever we may be, however we may be, we are home, because the Lord is our home. So we live with courage, so we live with joy, so we live eager to please the Lord in the life that we have. Not bitter, not envious, not self-pitying, but content and glad, because being home is a wonderful thing!