

Who, here in this place, does not long for home?
A true home, where you can come as you are;
where you are always welcome, where you know you belong?
A place where love has gone ahead of you and prepared a place for you?

Jesus, in the Gospel reading today, goes right to the heart of our human longing for home.

“Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God. Trust also in me. In my Father’s home there are many rooms, many dwelling places. I go ahead of you, to prepare a place for you.....”

These are powerful words, full of hope and promise. These are also comforting words are often read at funerals to offer hope and strength in the midst of loss and sorrow.

These words were lovingly offered by Jesus to his disciples as part of his “farewell speech” in the Upper Room on the night before his death – to comfort, to strengthen, to equip and to prepare.

These words were a gift given to them in the midst of a meal shared: an intimate meal between Jesus and his friends.....where something so simple but something so real – bread and wine, were blessed and given, as Jesus’ own body and Jesus’ own blood.

On this night, Jesus is preparing them for his death...for the chaos that was ahead of them.

When someone we know and love dies, we suffer a breaking apart of life as we know it. There is a profound sense of disorientation as we free fall into the unknown....

All of us have experienced this....many of us with the death of a loved one, but also through other losses:

- the loss of our strength or abilities; the loss or change in a relationship; the dire threat of loss happening in the environment – in the created world; moving to a different city or country; changing jobs or losing a job....and, for all of us recently,
- world-wide losses we haven’t even named yet from living through a pandemic.

Our very human tendency at times like these is to either come to grinding halt and retreat or to try and control the chaos by trying to re-creating what was.

At times like these we move into what Henri Nouwen calls: “The house of fear.” Henri writes in his book *Life Signs*:

“We are a fearful people. The more people I come to know and the more I come to know people, the more I am overwhelmed by the negative power of fear. It often seems that fear has invaded every part of our being to such a degree that we no longer know what a life without fear would feel like.

There always seems to be something to fear: something within us or around us, something close or far away, something visible or invisible, something in ourselves, in others, or in God.... often fear has penetrated our inner selves so deeply that it controls,(whether we are aware of it or not), most of our choices and decisions.”

I recently read a story by children’s author, Jean Little (– *Mama’s Going to Buy You a Mockingbird*). In this story there is a dad named Adrian and a son named Jeremy.

Adrian, the dad, is dying. In the midst of coming to terms with his own death, Adrian, the father, is trying very hard to prepare his 11 year old son. It seems an impossible situation. There is no way out of the shock, the loss, and the very real feelings of anger and fear.

But, Adrian, knows his son well. He has a real and loving relationship with Jeremy. He knows who he is; He knows what he needs: He knows the song of Jeremy’s heart.

Father and son have always shared a special interest in, and love for, birds and birdwatching. It’s a special thing they do, together, just them.

As part of preparing Jeremy for his death, Adrian gives his son something very special that will be a sign, a reminder of the love they share: a small, smooth, stone owl.... A carved stone that fits right inside the palm of Jeremy’s hand.

After Adrian dies, the stone owl becomes a sign of his dad’s unbreakable love. When Jeremy feels the weight of it in his hand he remembers; he digs deep inside and finds love and strength to go on.

This story by Jean Little is a small example of what Jesus was trying to do for the disciples on the night before his death.

He was trying to provide for them meaningful signs, and something solid to hold onto, as they search for and find their way out of the house of fear back into the house of love....

Jesus says to them: “On that day you will understand that I am in my Father and you are in me and I in you.”

The house of love, is a house of joy.... “a joy no one can take from you”:

Henri writes: “The joy that Jesus offers his disciples is his own joy, which flows from his intimate communion with the One who sent him....”

“.....those who live lives of joy (ecstatic lives) are always moving away from rigidly fixed situations and exploring new, unmapped dimensions of reality.....Here we see the essence of Joy. Joy is always new.

Whereas there can be old pain, old grief, old sorrow there can never be old joy. Old joy is not joy! Joy is always connected with movement, renewal, rebirth, change – in short, with life.”

In the powerful and reassuring words of the Gospel this morning, Jesus was both describing and enacting “the way, the truth and the life” - something so tangible and real, something that they had already shared together so many times as they travelled around together feeding the hungry, healing the sick and welcoming the outcast and sinner. Something that they could recognize and remember when he was no longer physically with them in his human form.....a way back home, a way out of the house of fear

It is about the invitation we heard today in St. Peter’s pastoral letter, written for Jesus’ followers scattered about Asia Minor, the invitation to “become a spiritual house, living stones....”

When Jesus says: “No one comes to the Father except through me.” he is saying being one with the Father is *a way of acting for others, and with others,*

... it is not a way that puts stones in front of people, so that they stumble and it is not a way that involves throwing stones at others so that they are silenced or excluded or even killed.

It is a way that is about seeing, welcoming, creating, being, becoming. It is a way that creates open communities, as Victoria said in her homily about the Good Shepherd last week, communities.... “always on the move, following the voice of the Shepherd.”

It is about living a life of trust. Jesus says over and over:

“trust me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; but if you do not, then trust me because *of the works that I do*....trust me because of the works themselves.” Trust my actions ...Remember how we travelled together on the roads of Galilee. Remember how, as we travelled together, I showed you how to care for one another...

Remember: “As I have loved you, you ought to love one another.”

There is a scene in Jean Little’s book, *after the death of Adrian*, where Jeremy, his Mother and his sister have had to move from a house to a small apartment to make ends meet.

Everything is upside down, everything is in boxes and they are tired, sad and discouraged. They are getting on each other’s nerves and fighting needlessly....

All of a sudden, Jeremy remembers that he was given some money from an Uncle at his father’s funeral with instructions “remember to take care of your sister and mother.”

Jeremy, in the midst of the fighting and chaos, tells his sister and mother that he is taking them out for dinner. He boldly announces: “.....get some nice clothes on, pronto! I’m taking us all out! NOW!”

His mother and sister are stunned....not because he has just inappropriately bossed his mom around, but because he has just used *exactly the same voice and expression that his Dad would have used* to try to move his family from chaos and fear to loving kindness and trust.

Is it possible that we are to become so much like Jesus that if people *see us*, or if people are *with us*, they also see and feel loving kindness and trust?

“Very truly, I tell you, the one who trusts in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father. I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If in my name, you ask me for anything, I will do it.”

I remember a very sincere and passionate homily a few years back where the homilist asked us a pointed question: “What are we doing here? ”

We are here to *remember who we are and to whom we belong*: we are people on the way; living stones, precious in God’s sight.

We are here to give witness to the Good News of Jesus,

who come to us from the dead ; and who offers abundant life to all...

We are here to become people who follow Jesus on the way – offering welcome and belonging in the house of love.