

Home

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[0 : 00] This morning we're going to meditate on home.

I don't mean the home campaign. As far as coincidences go, if you believe in such a thing, it's a bit of a coincidence that there might be something about the home campaign later in the service. But I'm talking about what Jesus says in John chapter 14. And we're reading John 14 this morning because that's what the lectionary tells us to read.

The lectionary is simply a list of readings that churches use on Sunday mornings. And so in the Anglican Church of North America, all the ACNA churches are reading John 14.

It was like this last week. Jen and I were visiting our son in college in Grove City, Pennsylvania. And so on Sunday morning we visited Anglican Church in Butler.

[1 : 01] And so we got to hear all about Jesus as the great shepherd, just like you did here. And so a great sign of unity that we're all reading and hearing the same things. And it's not just Anglican churches.

Our lectionary is similar to lectionaries used in other churches around the country. And so on this day, whether you're at Church of the Advent in Tacoma Park or Church of the Advent Episcopal in Birmingham, Alabama, or St. Paul's Lutheran Church in Los Angeles, or St. Teresa of Avila, Catholic Church in Anacostia, we're all hearing today about Jesus as the way, the truth, and the life. It's a beautiful way to think about the unity of the church, that we're all doing this together. So as we talk about John 14, we're going to talk about home.

We're going to talk about, is anybody else here a high-end feedback or is it just me? No. I think, there we go.

Okay, great. So we're going to talk about home. We're going to talk about the comfort of home. We're going to talk about the way home. And we're going to talk about longing for home.

[2 : 21] But before we do that, it'd be good to engage our imaginations on what is home. So let me ask you, what does home mean for you?

What does home, the word home, mean for you? Now let me ask, when you think about a true home, what images come to mind?

If you need to close your eyes to help you think, you can do that here. When you think about a true home, what images come to mind? Or, when you think about a true home, what feelings come?

Let's pray. Lord, for some of us, home, images of home, remembrances of home, brought feelings of security, familiarity, and belonging.

For others of us, we remember neglect, clutter, chaos, or pain.

[3 : 49] And so, Lord, all of us come needing to remember and know what is our true home.

What rest can be like in our true home. What belonging and familiarity and safety and security can be like in our true home.

Jesus, you are the way home. Reveal yourself to us. Show us the way home.

In Christ's name, amen. So, our reading from John 14 is a continuation of a conversation between Jesus and his disciples. That started in chapter 13.

Jesus and his disciples are in what's called the upper room. It's the night before Jesus is to go to his death. And he tells his disciples two things. The first is that Peter, who is very much a leader among the twelve disciples, is going to deny him three times.

[5 : 02] Which probably came as a shock. And Jesus tells him that he's going to be going away. So, imagine now how that must have felt. For three years, they've been following Jesus.

Constantly traveling, sleeping under the stars, sleeping in other people's homes. They've also had a front row seat to all of Jesus' miracles, to his healings, to his teachings.

He attracted thousands and thousands to himself. But these twelve, Jesus called his friends. Jesus knew them better than they knew themselves.

He encouraged them, laughed with them, rebuked them in love. They've never known anyone more compassionate, more loving, more gracious.

So, imagine the feelings of safety and security and belonging that they had with him. And were you to ask them, after three years of being with Jesus, what is home for you?

[6 : 08] They probably would have said, what? Jesus. They would have said Jesus. And for this, for them, home was a person. And we can understand that. I, earlier this week, asked a friend of mine this very question.

What is home for you? And my friend grew up in a really difficult home situation. So, he gave it some thought. And he said, I love this answer.

He said, home is the association of all the things that make me complete. And at the top of that list of things, he names people. He names people.

Specific people who cared for him, loved him, gave him a sense of safety and belonging. And that's spot on, isn't it, when you think about it. And it matches up with the disciples.

They actually say this themselves. Earlier in John, when many of Jesus' followers abandoned him, Jesus asked them, are you leaving me too? And Simon Peter replied, Lord, to whom shall we go?

[7 : 11] You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and to know that you are the Holy One of God. For them, Jesus was home.

And now, he tells them he's going away. So, imagine the feelings of grief and anxiety and confusion.

That they must have felt. So, how does Jesus comfort them? He says, do not let your hearts be troubled. And then he tells them about their true home.

He says, he's going away. And we'll prepare rooms for them in his father's house. So, what is his father's house? Well, the only other time that Jesus mentions his father's house, when he uses that phrase, is when he's talking about the temple in Jerusalem.

That temple was understood as the place where heaven and earth meet. So, Jesus here in John 14 is referring to a new temple, a new city, when heaven and earth will meet again, and the world will be renewed.

[8 : 17] What makes this place home is the presence of God himself. It's not the quality of the rooms. It's not the size of the mansion. It's God being there.

Later in the Bible, this same author, John, in the book of Revelation writes, Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea.

I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride, beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, Look, God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them.

They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.

So how is that comforting? How is that comforting? How does a future in heaven help us to endure present sufferings? Well, there's an oft-told story of the man who discovered that he inherited a huge estate.

[9 : 37] Instantly he became the owner of a mansion, horse-drawn carriages, perhaps a solid gold carriage, land, tons of land, and a large sum of money. And on the journey to receiving his inheritance, he was robbed.

The thieves took everything he had, even his shoes, and so he had to walk the rest of the way, which was a very long way, and he had to do it all barefoot. And he had to pick through other people's garbage for food to eat.

He had to sleep underneath bridges and in various places, and it was cold. But none of these troubles truly bothered him, and this wasn't because they weren't harsh and uncomfortable.

His feet got sliced up. They really were painful. Sleeping under the bridge really was cold. He was hungry all the time. Those things were very real. But he was able to endure those sufferings because he knew what lay ahead.

His inheritance enabled him to joyfully endure the trouble. As I was reading John 14 and preparing this sermon, I asked myself, how often when I experience hardship or grief do I reflect and meditate on heaven?

[10:59] And I've realized that to my very great detriment, I really don't very often. And I wonder why. I wondered why. I still wondered why.

I mean, I truly believe in heaven. I feel like I've staked my whole life on it. I love how I'm gonna see my dad again in heaven.

And yet it's still just not a thing that I think about very often, and I don't know why. I mean, maybe it's because I wouldn't have the right theology, and I think thinking about heaven as just too individualistic.

You know, Christianity isn't about getting your ticket punched for the afterlife. We're called to love and care for the world right now. I mean, as if the two were opposed to each other. Or maybe I'm giving myself too much credit.

Maybe it's because I've hammered my tent pegs into this earth too deeply because I love the things of this earth. I love my stuff. I love my comfort.

[12:02] And so I just don't really want to think about heaven or need to. I don't know. I don't know. What about you? How often do you think about heaven? How often does it bring you comfort amidst your confusion and grief?

Because for you and I, we're supposed to think about heaven and meditate on it. Paul writes to the Colossians, seek the things that are above where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.

Set your minds on things that are above, not on things on earth. He writes to the Philippians that our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.

And he writes to the Corinthians. He writes, for in this tent we groan, longing to put on our heavenly dwelling. And Jesus, to his disciples, he comforts them and tells them, I go to prepare a place for you.

And I go and prepare a place for you. I will come again, and I will take you to myself, that where I am, you may be also. So how do we get there?

[13:09] How do we get to heaven? How do we get to our home? Thomas said to him, Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way? And Jesus said to him, I am the way, the truth, and the life.

No one comes to the Father except through me. You know, I did a lot of studying on this verse this week, and I thought I would be able to come here and present, like, deep, overlooked meanings to these words, way and truth and life.

I thought that would be, like, the structure of my sermon, or I had it all figured out. I'm going to give a sermon that people will never forget. They'll understand this very familiar verse in a whole new way, and nope, it means, it means exactly what we have, as Christians who have grown up in the church, always heard it to mean.

It's very simple. There is no other way to heaven. There is no other way into union with the Father except through Jesus.

and that's it. Now, if you haven't grown up in the church and you're new to Christianity and you've been weighing whether you believe this stuff or not, there's some things I'd like you to know.

[14:24] The first is, I'd like you to know about the book of John itself. John is writing this book as an eyewitness account for diaspora Jews living all throughout the Greco-Roman world who were not Christians.

Why did he write this for them? John tells us. These are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

So practically speaking, for us here in this room, this book is written for you who aren't yet believers in Jesus Christ.

It's for you. It's written that you might believe that Jesus is the Son of God and that by believing you might have life in his name. When John wrote these words and 2,000 years later, I would read the words from John.

They were actually more for you than for the church, I would suggest. And it might have occurred to you that Jesus is making a very exclusive claim that he is the only way to the Father.

[15:39] There's not a multiplicity of paths to God and Jesus just giving one of them. He's saying that he's the only way. Now I understand the objections to exclusive claims, exclusive claims on

truth, that they ignore the various religious experiences and traditions across cultures and history.

I mean, I understand that argument. And I understand that such claims have been used to justify violence and persecution of others. So if that's your objection, I'd like you to separate two things. The first is the misuse of verses like this by many throughout history from the person who is actually making this claim.

Okay? There's the misuse of the claim and then there's the claim itself. And I'd like you to look at Jesus, the one who made this claim. Look at his teachings, look at his life, look at his love and compassion, and ultimately look at what vindicates these claims, his death on the cross and his resurrection from the dead.

And after weighing such things and you decide, yes, I want to believe, well then, what's next? And belief in Jesus means this.

[17:01] It means acknowledging that Jesus is king. It means that in some form or another you've been in rebellion against this king.

It means asking for his forgiveness, and it means telling him that you want to follow him and that you need his help. Now, if talking to him in that way feels weird to you, I would love to help you do it or Rob or Tommy or Lisa or Jeff.

We would love to help you do this. If you're not ready to do that, I would urge you to continue to look at Jesus' claims by reading the first four books of the New Testament, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

They're eyewitness accounts of all the things Jesus did and said. Go to the source. Okay, we've talked about the comfort of home, the way home, now let's talk about cultivating a longing for home. This is the application. If eternal life with the Father is indeed a comfort, then it would make sense for the Father's children to constantly meditate on the subject.

[18:14] So how does one go about doing that? Well, one way is to constantly to pray for his return. That when faced with difficult trials or sufferings, to pray, come Lord Jesus.

So when your job makes you feel futility rather than productivity, pray, come Lord Jesus. that when you see terrible events in the news like the wars in Ukraine or Sudan, pray, come Lord Jesus. When you hear news of another mass shooting like we heard yesterday from Texas, pray, come Lord Jesus.

Praying for his return reminds us the justice that he will bring to this earth, to the end of suffering and sorrow that he will bring.

And rather than disengaging from the world, praying for his return activates our hope and helps us to engage the world and our vocations and to work for peace and reconciliation and justice.

[19:31] Another way to meditate on heaven is to read others' meditations on heaven. In the last 2,000 years there's been a lot of them. My favorite is a book called *The Saints' Everlasting Rest* by the English pastor Richard Baxter written in the 17th century.

He meditates on heaven and explains how meditating on our eternal rest gives us present rest and encouragement. And lastly, immerse yourself in scripture.

scripture. Because from the beginning to the end, scripture talks about home. From the very beginning, it speaks of the original design of man to live in unity with God in paradise.

And though our rebellion has separated us from that paradise, he sent Jesus to make a way back to him and promises that he will come again to renew and restore the world where we will live together with him in perfect rest and joy.

So I'm going to close by quoting that book of Richard Baxter's. Christian, believe this and think on it.

[20:47] Thou shalt be eternally embraced in the arms of that love which was from everlasting and will extend to everlasting. eternally embraced in the arms of that love which brought the son of God's love from heaven to earth, from earth to the cross, from the cross to the grave, and from the grave to glory.

Eternally embraced in the arms of that love which was weary, hungry, tempted, scorned, scourged, buffeted, spit upon, crucified, pierced.

that love which did fast, pray, teach, heal, weep, sweat, bleed, die. That love will eternally embrace thee.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Let's pray. Amen. Lord, give us a vision of our home.

And Lord, would that vision of home fill us with rest. Lord, would it fill us with hope that we can extend that rest and hope and joy to others around us.

[22 : 09] Lord, that we could extend it to our family, our friends, our housemates, our neighbors, to our city, Lord. Would this hope of home help us transform this city into a place of rest and love and joy and peace.

Lord, comfort us in our sorrows and our struggles. Thank you for this promise, Lord. Thank you that our place in heaven, our room there is as secured as for those who are already there. Thank you for such promises. We pray in Christ's name. Amen.