Homesick

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 28 November 2021

Preacher: Pastor Cathy Hall Stengel

[0:00] Good morning.

May the peace of Christ be with you. So turn to your neighbor and express to them the peace of Christ. Stay in your seats, wave, whatever you want to do to say good morning.

Thank you. Thank you.

This is the first Sunday in Advent, the first of four weeks as we prepare for Christmas. And our theme this Advent is come home for Christmas.

And so I want to just say to you before we start in this call to worship, if I, can you see my feet? If I went like this, what would we say?

[1:08] There's no place like home. There's no place like home. And this season, our sense is that throughout all of Scripture and throughout really all of our lives, we are often looking for home.

Either looking back at what was home or looking at what we hope will be home. And the God we serve says, come home to me.

Come home to God. Come home and find Jesus. So I invite you to join with me in these opening words. Can one be homesick for something you've never known?

Yes, we are homesick.

We are homesick for the world that God has always promised us. We are homesick. We are not available. We are coming home.

[2:26] God is here. God is still creating. Let us worship holy God. Amen. Thank you. Thank you.

Everyone ready? Please stand as we sing our first hymn of anticipation. Come though long expected Jesus. Come, thou long-expected Jesus, Born to set thy people free From our fears and sins release us Let us find our rest in thee Israel's strength and consolation Hope of all the earth thou art

Dear desire of every nation Joy of every longing heart Born thy people to deliver Born a child and yet a king Born to reign in us forever Now thy gracious kingdom bring By thine own eternal spirit Rule in all our hearts alone By thine own sufficient merit

Raise us to thy glorious throne You may be seatedructure as a king Get i got there We hope for a world where all are fed.

We hope for a world with more bridges than walls. We hope for a world with wide open doors. We hope for a world with contagious laughter. We hope for a world where trees grow tall and creeks run clear.

[5:57] We hope for a world where all people feel at home, in their bodies, in the church, in their physical homes. We hope for that world. We long for that world.

We are homesick for that world. So today we light the candle of hope because hope keeps our hearts alive as we wait.

May this light be a reminder that the wait is always worth it. We are close to home. May we carry hope with us. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.

Also if you are watching online we do have it available online this year so you can choose it either from the tree or online. And we've already started to collect some of the items that are back.

Those need to be returned to the church by Sunday December 12th. Family of Faith, it doesn't take long to see that we're not home yet.

There are people who are hungry, oceans that are polluted, churches that are fading, walls that are growing. We as a people clearly are not home yet.

So until we reach that promised day, until we make it home, giving what we can to make a better world matters. When we give our tithes and our offerings, we help to build God's home here.

[8:17] So with hopeful hearts, let us give. So this is how it was, a silent night like any other.

When heaven sent the one, a silent night like any other. When heaven sent the one, a silent night like any other.

When heaven sent the one, a silent night like any other. When heaven sent the one, a silent night like any other.

When heaven sent the one, the one that we would call our Savior. We call our Savior. And redemption began in a stable in Bethlehem.

All of the angels lifted up their voices and filled the night with hallelujah.

[9:26] God is with us now. Everyone come and join the heavenly chorus.

Our Savior, King is living for us. All to hear the sound. The song creation sang when hope came down.

So this was truly God, wrapped up in a tattered blanket.

And the song creation sang when love was finally here. Sleeping while the world awakened. And redemption began with a baby in Bethlehem.

All of the angels lifted up their voices and filled the night with hallelujah. God is with us now.

[10:43] God is with us now. Everyone come and join the heavenly chorus. Our Savior, King is living for us.

All to hear the sound. The song creation sang when hope came down. So let us sing redemption song. Let us worship Christ, the holy Lord. We were lost when hope came down.

We were lost but we were found. When hope came down. When hope came down. Let us worship Christ the Holy Lord We were lost but we were found When hope came down When hope came down All of the angels lifted up their voices And filled the night with hallelujah God is with us now Every time we come and join the heavenly chorus Our Savior King is here before us All to hear the sound

That's all creation say When hope came down Matthew heart God, we are homesick.

We long for the day that you spoke of when swords will be beaten into plowshares. The lion will lie down with the lamb and justice will roll like waters.

[13:42] Until that holy day comes, take these gifts and use them to build that world here. We're hopeful. In your name we pray. Amen.

You may be seated. So we come to a time of sharing. Do we have any joys or concerns that you'd like to lift up today?

Thank you. My husband is pregnant. No, she's the maid. Jason is the maid. So two pregnancies.

Kelly. I'm grateful for kids home from college and for dad and mom here and helping. Yes, definitely. Family visiting has been very special this week.

Margaret, I'm glad we're going to go with you. Okay. So in this time of celebration, we do have COVID still in our midst. And we want to keep all of those who are affected in our prayers.

Okay. Please pray with me. God of the weary and waiting. Scripture tells us that where two or more are gathered, you are here.

So we trust that you're here listening to these words, drawing us close, stirring hope, awaken us. And for that, we are grateful. We're so grateful.

Today, God, we feel close to home, close to you when we hear music, when the candles are lit, when we enter this space and someone knows our name or just says hello.

We feel close to home when our children are curious, when we find moments of true connection and when we are brave enough to be who you called each of us to be.

God, even with gratitude for our close to home moments, we also recognize that buried deep within us, we have homesick hearts. God, we're homesick for a world that we've not seen.

[16:00] We're homesick for a world where oceans are clean, trees are green, and animals are not endangered. We are homesick for a life where days feel expansive and the Sabbath feels possible.

We are homesick for days when mental health is not stigmatized, time is not a commodity, and self-worth is not a scarcity. God, who never leaves us alone, we are carrying both hope and homesickness all at the same time.

Hold these two sides of the same coin tenderly and fan the flame of both. For we realize hope is a gift and homesickness is a reminder.

For each conviction, we give you all thanks. In your name we pray. Amen. Amen. Amen. This morning we have a brief prayer before we read our scriptures.

Let's join together. God of the stars and God of our hearts, our days will pass, but your words will last.

[17:40] The earth might fade, but your words will last. Our memories might blur, but your words will last. The grass will wither, but your words will last.

The sky could go dark, and your words would last. So as we listen today, help us to hold on to what will last.

Help us hold on to you. Gratefully, we pray. Amen. Our scripture reading this morning, we have two selections.

One from 1 Thessalonians, chapter 3, verses 9 through 13, and the book of Luke, chapter 21, verses 27 through 36. From 1 Thessalonians.

1 Thessalonians. How can we thank God enough for you, given all the joy we have because of you before our God? Night and day we pray more than ever to see all of you in person and to complete whatever you still need for your faith.

[18:42] Now, may our God and Father himself and our Lord Jesus guide us on our way back to you. May the Lord cause you to increase and enrich your love for each other and for everyone in the same way as we also love you.

May the love cause your hearts to be strengthened, to be blameless in holiness before our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all his people. Amen.

And from the book of Luke. And then, then, they will see the Son of Man welcomed in grand style. A glorious welcome.

When all this starts to happen, up on your feet, stand tall with your heads high, help is on the way. He told them a story. Look at a fig tree, any tree for that matter.

When the leaves begin to show, one look tells you that summer is right around the corner. The same here. When you see these things happen, you know God's kingdom is about here.

[19:47] Don't brush this off. I'm not just saying this for some future generation, but for this one, too. These things will happen. Sky and earth will wear out.

My words won't wear out. But be on your guard. Don't let the sharp edge of your expectation get dulled by parties and drinking and shopping.

Otherwise, that day is going to take you by complete surprise, spring on you suddenly like a trap. For it's going to come on everyone, everywhere, at once.

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Amen. When you think about home, how many of you think of the home you grew up in?

You can, I'm not raising my hand, but you can raise your hand. How many of you think of the home that you're in now? Is it the same place?

[21:01] The place where you grew up and where you live? How many of you think of home as the place that's going to be at some point? Anybody?

Home in scripture is one of those images, one of those perceptions that's far wider than we might be able to imagine.

You know, we have throughout scripture, you always get the impression, no matter where you pop in and read the scriptures, you feel like you're on a journey. People are always on their way someplace or trying to build something or fix something.

You go through the Old Testament and they're fighting for something or they're talking with God about something and they're trying. It feels to always get to that place of faithfulness, that place of wholeness, and they get pulled away by temptation and by things that are kind of shiny or by a feeling of defeat.

And yet the guidance is always there to get closer to where God is. We look at people like the Israelites.

[22:21] Moses is taking them away from the home they were in, which was a home of slavery and oppression and cruelty. And Moses was taking them to the promised land, which would be their home, but they couldn't yet see it.

So they were filled with both a homesickness for what they left, as terrible as it was, and they were filled with a sense of homesickness for where it was that they were going.

They couldn't stay in slavery and oppression, but they couldn't see where they were going and they were hungry and tired and cold and hot and thirsty and they whined a lot.

And that came from a sense of not finding a home on one side or the other, not yet. So they were on their way.

We think about the prophets, Jeremiah, Elijah, Elisha, all so many of the prophets are trying to take the people of Israel to a place.

[23 : 25] Not just a physical place where the temple could be rebuilt, but a place of connection with God. A place where people stopped with being pulled by temptation to other gods.

A place of connection, full and close connection. We move into the New Testament and we begin to hear the story of Jesus. We begin to hear the story, well we actually started to hear that story in the Old Testament.

Behold, a Savior will be born unto the nations. And now, here the Savior is going to be born. We hear about Jesus traveling with the disciples from place to place to place.

We hear about, I can't remember what his name is, if he even had a name. The man who met on the side of the road and ended up being baptized and then went on to be able to participate fully in worship.

So many times and places in our scriptures this morning speak to some of those very things. Paul is talking to the Thessalonians about how grateful for that feeling of love and care and connection.

[24:48] Because when he was with them, they were a responsive congregation. They were filled with love for Jesus, for one another, and for Paul. And in some ways he was homesick for that feeling.

Because by now when he's writing, he's been imprisoned. He's been beaten. He's been treated badly. And he thinks back to his time with the Thessalonians.

And thinks, this is what it means to be home. This place of faith. So what about us? We think about home.

We think about what it means. It's a little romanticized in our culture. I mean, why else would they have Hallmark movies? If there wasn't a romanticized sense of what it means to be home, Hallmark would be out of business.

Because that rosy fireplace glow and the ornament hanging on the tree with just the perfect light. We sometimes long for that home that we imagine.

[25:55] We sometimes long for our children, if we have them, to be all around us. And of course everybody looks beautiful for pictures. Everybody's getting along.

There's no fighting. It's something we're imagining for those of you who have children at home. The scripture reading from Luke is talking about the day when Jesus returns and we all go home.

Luke, this is called the little apocalypse. Because it's talking about something that then is continued in the letters to the epistles that follow the gospels.

Hebrews, Romans, the letters, they're filled with stories about get ready. Be ready. Remember to believe in Jesus Christ as Savior.

Because that, and you hear this often, that is the real thing. That is the real thing in this world of chaos.

[27:02] So don't be lost. And you heard it. You know, parties and chaos and drinking and shopping. You'd think that maybe they were like here. Not here in the church.

But here in our lives where we are tempted to do those kinds of things 24 hours a day. The call is to come home to Jesus before Jesus comes back.

And there's a little bit of a, guys, get your life in order. Get your faith in place. Because when Jesus comes back, that's going to be the final day.

They believed, as you might read in the scriptures, they believed that was going to be any minute. It's coming. Quick, quick, quick. Talk about stress. Get ready. Jesus is coming.

Have your life together. Have everything right. But I think that the real call was come home. Come home to the place and the way of faith that is the true home.

[28:05] Come home to the place where it doesn't matter if there's Christmas paper or ribbons left on the floor from when they were being prepared.

Or when Santa delivered them and the trash got littered behind. Come home. Come home. Because what matters is our faith.

What matters is that we find our way back from the chaos, from COVID, from the disasters that have happened.

You know, places burning down. Places ravaged by hurricanes and floods and all of that. And in the midst of all of that, the call is come home.

Come home. Come home where the fire of the Holy Spirit burns for us now and every day and all the time. Come home to the place where Jesus promises that we will be welcomed always with a warm embrace, with love, with care, with forgiveness, with a thought that what's behind is behind.

[29:17] Just come home. Just come home. Just come home. Just come home whether you've never been home. Some people have never found their home.

Some people have never found their physical, emotional home. And some people have never found their home in Jesus Christ.

We are a culture and a world of people wandering. Used to be people never really went more than a mile or two from where they grew up.

And they stayed and they stayed in a circle of comfort and relationship and support. But we became a mobile society.

My family moved probably, well, I went to three elementary schools, one middle school and high school. But then my parents moved again and again.

[30:12] And my father wasn't in the military and he wasn't a United Methodist pastor either. He worked for the automotive industry which interestingly is just as mobile.

So figuring out what home was, home was what we made it. Home was hanging the stockings no matter where the stockings were hung.

Home was hanging the stockings no matter where the stockings were hung. And as we raised our children who largely just lived in two places while they were growing up, there was a sense that if we were there, it was home.

Now, I haven't asked my children. So when you think back, where do you think of when you think of home? Maybe they would say where they are now, that's my hope, is that they're making their homes and their sense of belonging.

When it comes to where their home is in their faith, I feel confident about that and about what they would say.

[31:16] And I even watch them unfold in that faith, although they don't always find a church home to practice that. More than church.

More than a fireplace. More than a tree decorated. More than lights in the night sky. The home that we're being called to.

The place where I think many of us are homesick for is a place that it isn't this, but it's a place like this where we can have some peace, some rest, some quiet.

But this call to come home for Christmas this Advent season is that. To each week in your life, in your faith journey as we go towards the birth of Jesus Christ, that you would come home.

That you would come home either watching on your computer or coming to this place or doing what it is that you need to do to have a sense that you are where you belong.

[32:33] And that the God who birthed you and the Savior who saved you and the Holy Spirit who nudges you this way and this way and this way will always lead you home.

They say home is where the heart is. Home for people of faith and for people who are not yet of faith is the place where we are one with Jesus Christ.

Do we always know what that feels like? I think not. I just know that we are being called to come home.

To come home to the places where we can shed the worries of the world. Where we can just take some time out. Where we can sing Christmas carols.

Because even though there is COVID out there, last year we didn't sing one note of a Christmas carol. Thank you, Jesus, that we can sing Christmas carols.

[33:37] And be reminded. Why do we have Christmas? Because God said they don't understand. They don't understand.

They keep turning to ball, to shiny things. They keep being distracted and falling away. And I need to send them a Savior in the form that they can grasp and understand.

And who doesn't feel a sense of love and attraction to the image of a newborn baby? Because, of course, Jesus is never crying in any of the pictures.

And someone else is taking care of him. But he knew, God knew, that we could relate to being born.

We might not understand all the Savior stuff right away. But what God knew was that we needed someone named Jesus who we could relate to.

[34:38] A man and a Savior. A teenager. A young adult. A man who was human and felt things like we do. And was also the Savior of the world.

So God sent Jesus. His only begotten Son. That whosoever may love him. May be saved and offered eternal life.

Which is our ultimate home. It's the ultimate healing. It's our ultimate home. But for now, since I'm not seeing anybody who's right on their way there right this minute.

We live in this home. In faith, Let's pray, Lord, surround us with your Holy Spirit.

Help us to be reminded that no matter what home we're missing.

[35:38] No matter how we find ourselves thinking wistfully or tearfully about what we hope or what should be. That we can always turn to you.

In whom we are home. Because home is the place where we are loved no matter what. And that's home with you.

Home is the place where we are reminded that we have gifts to offer. That we can make a difference in the world. And that is often through you, Lord.

Home is the place where we can lay down some of our concerns that we cannot control. And put them into your keeping. Hear us, O Lord.

As we find our way home. Amen. As Pastor Kathy has reminded us, Home for a many of us is the place where we are at one with Jesus.

[37:02] And as we prepare to come to the table, let that ring true in your heart. We're going to start today with a prayer of confession. And so I would invite everyone to ready their hearts as we come before God together.

When you're a kid and you get homesick at a sleepover or at a summer camp. You call home and your parents come and get you. Sometimes that's what love looks like.

Love bails us out. In the same way, when we call upon God to confess something that we've messed up. Or something that we've forgotten.

Or overlooked something. God answers with grace. God answers with love. So let us confess today.

Knowing that nothing can keep God from loving us. Gracious God, we find ourselves with two options every day.

[38:04] To stay homesick for the world you had in mind. Or to allow cynicism to win. Do we hope against hope? Or do we throw in the towel?

Do we insist on a better world? Or do we assume it's impossible? Forgive us for the days when cynicism wins.

Forgive us for numbing our homesick hurt. Instead of using it to fuel a better world. Kindle in us a hope that won't let go.

Gratefully we pray. Amen. Family of faith. Even when we throw in the towel. Even when we give up hope.

God does not give up on us. We are loved. We are claimed. We are invited closer to God's home. So hear and trust this good news.

[39:04] There is room for us in God's house. And nothing can separate us from that love. We are claimed. We are forgiven. We are welcomed home.

Thanks be to God. Amen. The Lord be with you. And also be with you. Lift up your hearts. We lift them up to the Lord. Let us give thanks to the Lord, our God.

We give the right to give our thanks and grace. God of our salvation. We sometimes feel that we don't deserve your love. And yet, you lavish it upon us.

Not being content to be apart from us. You came to us in human form. Donning flesh and becoming one of us. You are not a God that is removed from our reality.

But is intimately present in our lives and our struggles. We lift up to you our thanks for your presence among us. We give thanks for your Son, Jesus Christ.

[40:08] The very incarnation of your being on this earth. With all of creation. With all peoples in every time and in every place. We join the everlasting chorus.

Holy, holy, holy Lord. God of power and might. Heaven and earth are full of your glory. Hosanna in the highest.

Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest. We remember how you called your servant Mary to bear your son.

How you called your servant Joseph to accompany her. How you called the wise men to search and the shepherds to ponder. How you called John to proclaim and Jesus to be baptized.

How you called Peter and the disciples to follow and to serve. With them we gather on the night on which Jesus was betrayed.

[41:11] When after having dinner with his friends, he took the bread. Blessed it. And broke it. And gave it to his disciples saying.

Take and eat. Do this in remembrance of me. Likewise, he took the cup. And pouring it and giving it to them, he said.

Take. This is the cup of salvation. In which my blood is shed. For the forgiveness of sins. Do this in remembrance of me.

And as we wait during this blessed rest. Known as the season of Advent. We proclaim the mystery of faith. Christ has died.

Christ has risen. Christ will come again. We give thanks for your gifts of grace. And ask that your Holy Spirit would come. To bless this sacrament.

[42:16] That we might reside with you. And you in us. Hear us. As we pray the prayer. You taught us to pray. Saying.

Our Father. Who art in heaven. Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done. On earth. As it is in heaven.

Give us this day. Our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses. As we forgive those. Who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation.

But deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom. And the power. And the glory. Forever. Amen. Amen. Those serving today, please join us.

Amen. Amen.

[44:58] Amen.

Amen. so that you might experience Christ in this unique and special way.

The grace of God might flow through you in this way that only God can give. As you feel the spirit compelled, please move to the center. Come down to the front and receive the elements from one of the servers.

If you prefer, you can receive prepackaged elements. There's a gluten-free station here on the far right of the sanctuary. Please open your heart. As the spirit comes and move as the table is open.

Christ whose glory fills the skies Christ the everlasting light Son of righteousness Arise And triumph for these shades of night Come, O Lord, in the fullness of your love And lose this heart bound up by shame And I will never be the same So here I wait in hope of you My soul's longing through and through

Days spring from on I be near Day star in my heart appear Dark and cheer Dark and cheerless is the morn Until your love in me is born Each text names And joyless is the p fand joyless is the evening sun A delightful night Erie And the power of prayer And joyless is the evening sun And joyless is the evening sun Until Emmanuel has come Here I wait in hope of you My soul's longing through and through Dayspring come and I be near Days to end my heart appear

And here I wait in hope of you My soul's longing through and through Dayspring come and I be near Days to end my heart appear And here I wait in hope of you My soul's longing through and through Days to end my heart appear And here I wait in hope of you My soul's longing through and through Days to end my heart appear Days to end my heart appear

And here I wait in hope of you My soul's longing through and through Days to end my heart appear And here I wait in hope of you Days to end my heart appear And here I wait in hope of you My soul's longing through and through Days to end my heart appear And here I wait in hope of you My soul's longing through and through Days to end my heart appear Days to end my heart appear And here I wait in hope of you And here I wait in hope of you Days to end my heart appear Amen.

Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. In the song that you just heard for Communion, Christy Knuckles adapted Charles Wesley's morning hymn, and some of the words are just so poetic in the fact that they refer to Jesus as day spring and day star, and I thought I'd share this particular scripture with you.

[51:25] It's from 2 Peter 1, verses 19 through 21. It says, And we have the prophetic word more fully confirmed, to which you will do well to pay attention as a lamp shining in a dark place until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts, knowing this first of all that no prophecy of scripture comes from someone's own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

So I invite you to stand as we sing our two closing songs, verse being, It Came Upon a Midnight Clear. It Came Upon a Midnight Clear, That glorious song of old, From angels bending near the earth, To death and death, To touch their arms of gold.

Peace on the earth, good will to men, From heavens, O gracious King.

The world in solemn stillness lay, To hear the angels sing.

And beneath my crushing Lord, Whose horns are bending low, Who toil along the climbing way, With painful steps and slow.

[53:36] Look now for bad and old enough, Come swiftly on the wing.

O rest beside the weary road, And hear the angels sing.

For though the days are hasty, How my prophets sing of old, When with the ever-circling years Shall come the time foretold, When peace shall over all the earth Its anxious splendors claim, And now the world gives back the song, Where shall the angels sing.

The Lord gives back the song, Where shall the angels sing. Are you far away from home This dark and lonely night?

Tell me what best would help To ease your mind Someone to give direction for This unfamiliar road The one who says follow me And I will lead you home How beautiful, how precious The Savior of all To love so completely The loneliest soul How gently, how tenderly

[56:36] He says to one and all Child, you can follow me And I will lead you home Close me and follow me I will lead you home guitar solo in the time Shall I make Up

I ask Thee to stay Close by Thee forever And love Thee, I pray Bless all the dear children And the tender care And take us to heaven To live with Thee there Take us to heaven To live with Thee there One of the things that pastors often have the advantage of seeing

Is that on Christmas Eve When we stand and we see all the candles lit We feel like everybody has come home for Christmas Let's all come home to Christ For Christmas Just because Come to Jesus That you may be loved into wholeness And find your way home Tonight we will be decorating the church So if you'd like to come There's information in the bulletin There's going to be a variety of Advent devotional kinds of things available I have a few of them here for people to take home They'll be available throughout the season If you would like to have one And so go in peace And let us make this world home

Amen Amen Bye Moving I'm like making stuff up.

Oh. Oh. Oh. Oh. Oh. Oh. Oh.

[61:00] Oh. Oh.

Oh. Oh. Oh. Oh. Oh. Oh. Oh.

Oh. Oh. Oh. Oh. Oh. Oh. Thank you.

Thank you.