A Home For All

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Preacher: Pastor Jennifer Stamm

[0:00] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[2:30] Thank you.

Thank you.

This week we continue on our sermon series on coming home and this week we look at a home for all. We as people of faith have a job to create a home for all and it's not an easy task.

We're looking to channel some of John the Baptist's courage to tell the truths about ourselves and our world. We do this not to shame ourselves and we're not alone.

By the Lord's grace and we're not alone.

[4:48] We're looking to call to worship.

Let us draw near to God.

We're looking to call to God's and Charles Wesley.

And what he points to is the coming kingdom where the oppressed will be freed and Christ will rule with equity. So I invite you to stand as we're looking to call to the Lord's name. He comes to the Lord's name.

To help the Lord's name. To Him shall we're looking to call to the Lord's name.

[7:57] He comes to the Lord's name. And there's a kingdom where the Lord's name. He comes to the Lord's name. His kingdom where the Lord's name. His kingdom where the Lord's name is.

A kingdom where the Lord's name is. His kingdom where the Lord's name is. His kingdom will lead. His kingdom with an end.

Our kingdom with an end. The time of time shall never. His covenant will lead. His kingdom with an end. You may be seated.

Morning again, church. So, as we ponder our time of giving, we often ask the question, is there anything that we can do that makes a real difference?

And as we go through that world, we wonder sometimes, do I give enough? Can I give more? Will anything I do really make a difference? John the Baptizer taught us that if you have two coats, you should give one away.

[9:20] And understanding that simple truth, knowing that your gifts and offerings will make a difference where all will have a home, let the spirit rest in your heart as we prepare to share what God has so greatly shared with us this morning.

Are we going to light the Advent candle?

Are we going to light the Advent candle? Are we going to light the Advent candle?

Okay. Okay. Okay. Am I good. Oh no? Okay. It's good. Okay. Good. Here we go. You're good. Thank you. Thank you. Welcome. So we love the Advent moderators. There is a term, thoughts we moisturized today there may be on the Advent leva Island platform.

once apart. Joy is hearing, come on over, it has been too long. Joy is the stretches and giggles of the newborn child. Joy is making it home when the journey is long. Joy is your dogs sliding to meet you at the door. Joy is the energy of a new season. Joy is feeling found when you thought you were lost.

[10:50] So today we light the candle of joy because the welcome God has for us is nothing short of joyful. Rest in the good news, let it wash over you. Family of faith, we are close to home. Amen.

Jesen Day Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you.

I'll lead you home. Vultures of darkness ate the crumbs left. You got no way to retrace your steps.

[13:27] Leave it to me. I'll leave you home. Hear me calling. Hear me calling.

Lost and known. Just leave it to me. I'll lead you home. Hear me calling.

Hear me calling. Lost and known. Leave it to me. I'll lead you home.

Oh, Oh, Thank you.

Thank you.

[15:11] I'll lead you home. Leave it to me. I'll lead you home.

Hear me, darling.

Hear me, darling. Lost and alone. Leave it to me. I'll lead you home.

Hear me, darling. Hear me, darling. Lost and alone.

Leave it to me. I'll lead you home. Just leave it to me.

[16:11] I'll lead you home. I'll lead you home. I'll lead you home.

Amen. God who welcomes us home, who creates space, who leaves a chair with our name on it.

We have two coats, and we're giving one away. That's what this offering is. It's our second coat. It's our hearts on our sleeves. It's our audacious hope that there can indeed be a better world than this one.

So take these gifts and use them to move us closer to that promised day. Gratefully we pray. Amen. Good morning.

Good morning. It's good to see you on this beautiful day after a very difficult day yesterday. And so we come to this place of sharing joys and concerns and offering our hearts and thoughts to God.

[18:08] I want to say that I failed to announce last week that Marjorie's husband, James, or Ray, had died and no arrangements have been made yet.

So we'll let you know about that. Are there things you would like to share? Yes. Yes. Definitely it's a time.

Thank you. Elizabeth? I just want to thank everybody for their financial donations, their gifts for all those new children. It's just a wonderful outcome.

It's a thing that I love. You look back there and we think about what all that will mean. Pretty incredible.

Did I see another person? Yes. Becky? Yes. Let's pray.

[19:36] Oh, Lord, you always leave the light on for us. The light of you being our home, no matter where we are.

We pray that those who are waking up in shambles after storms this week and tornadoes and all kinds of things that have happened.

There will be a place with the light on. There will be a place where people are welcoming those who are homeless now into shelters.

There are so many things that put us on the edge of losing our homes. COVID. COVID. It doesn't take away our homes, but it takes away what we thought felt like home.

Winds and trees and the storms of life that blow. They can sometimes make us feel unsettled.

[20:51] Losses and death. And also comfort in your eternal presence. Lord, we give you thanks for so much for all of the coats, the toys, the gifts that will bless people.

We give you thanks for the generosity of this congregation in feeding, in supporting, in offering a hand or a hug that makes it feel like this is our home.

May this, the sanctuary and the space of worship, may this be the home we turn to when other places don't feel right.

When we're wondering. When we're wandering. When we feel as though the home we have known.

The people we have known. Are no longer here for us. May we come. And find you. For you are always.

[22:01] The God of our hearts. The God of our path. The Holy Spirit of healing. And the Jesus Christ of saving. Give us joy this day in that.

In Jesus name. Amen. Let us pray.

God whose love is like the sun warming me from the inside. If you are my home, then your word is the streetlight guiding me there. So I want you to know, I am walking your way.

We are walking your way. And we are looking for a light. And our feet are dirty. We've lost our way a time or two. And our bags are heavy.

We carry an array of grief and fear on our backs. But we're on our way. We're looking for your light. We're listening for your word. When you see us coming.

[23:31] When you feel our hearts move. We hope you'll run down the driveway and catch us. Leave the light on. We are on our way home. Gratefully we pray.

Amen. Today's scripture is from Luke chapter 3 verses 1 through 18.

In the 15th year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, when Pontius Pilate was the governor of Judea, Herod, tetraarch of Galilee, his brother Philip, tetraarch of Aeturia, and Trachonetus, and Lysanias, tetraarch of Abilene, during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John, son of Zechariah in the wilderness.

He went into all the country around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. As it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet, a voice of one calling in the wilderness, prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.

Every valley shall be filled in, every mountain and hill made low. To crooked roads shall become straight, the rough way smooth. And all the people will see God's salvation.

[24:56] John said to the crowds, coming out to be baptized by him, You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? Produce fruit in keeping with repentance.

And do not begin to say to yourselves, We have Abraham as our father. For I tell you that out of these stones, God can raise up children for Abraham. The axe is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.

What should we do then? The crowd asked. John answered, Anyone who has two shirts should share with the one who has none, and anyone who has food should do the same.

Even tax collectors came to be baptized. Teacher, they said. What should we do? Don't collect any more than you are required to, he told them. Then some soldiers asked him, And what should we do?

He replied, Don't extort money, and don't accuse people falsely. Be content with your pay. The people were waiting expectantly, and were all wondering in their hearts if John might possibly be the Messiah.

[26:08] John answered them all, I baptize you with water, but one who is more powerful than I will come, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie.

He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.

And with many other words, John exhorted the people and proclaimed the good news to them. This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

Thank you. Will you pray with me, please?

Lord, we thank you for the gift of your word. As we think on these things, open our hearts and our minds to hear you. Amen. So Advent is the season of hope and the season of peace.

[27:21] We know that we can have hope in Jesus Christ and hope in living as God wants us to. We know that we can have the peace knowing that the Holy Spirit changes our hearts and our lives.

And we find ourselves more at peace with God and with ourselves, others, and our world. So this week is joy. Joy is a choice.

Made by opening our hearts and trusting in God's love. In the reading today, we hear about John the Baptist. And John is busy preaching. And he wanted people to repent of their sins and experience that grace of God.

John is telling them about the coming of the Messiah, the Son of God. And he's calling all people, no matter who they are, to come. John wants people to experience that transformation in their lives that comes from knowing Christ.

We have comfort in knowing that the Messiah comes to bring about salvation and justice. He will make all things right. But he will also separate the good from the bad and use the fire to burn up all that is undesirable.

[28:34] But what I want to point out in John's message is that the acceptance of Christ leads to that spiritual fruit-bearing life. John believed that accepting Christ, that it would alter our lives.

It would change everything about us. And that the fire would burn from within. The light that comes from knowing the love of God would come from within us. We build up walls and put up blocks between each other and with God.

Ashamed that we might feel unworthy or that we might not be living up to God's purpose for our lives. And that maybe somebody might see that something's not shiny or it's perfect.

The image of fire can be beautiful, like the burning of the candles at Christmastime. Or a fire in the fireplace. Almost mesmerizing. But it can be dangerous.

We read in Luke, every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. And he talks about burning the chaff. With unquenchable fire.

[29:42] I want to share a story with you from Reverend Dr. Janet Hunt. She said she was six years old and she was going camping with her family. And they were going to be spending the next week there.

And they had been driving for a really long time. And her and her younger sisters were just waiting to get out of the car. And as her father started to set up camp, her mother walked her sisters down to use the bathroom.

And she stayed behind. And in those very next moments, her father told her to stay away from the fire. There was coals from the last camper.

And she was barefoot. She had taken her shoes off hours before. And her father said, even though they didn't look like it, those coals were probably hot.

And to make sure she stayed away from them. And then he turned his back. And immediately, like a six-year-old child, she forgot what he said. And she walked right through those coals.

[30 : 45] She said she could still hear the echoing of his warning words in her ear. And she was ashamed. And so she stopped the cry that arose from her throat and never said a word.

Not in spite of the pain. She said the burden could not have been that bad or she would not have been able to go through the entire week without somebody noticing her limping. That could have had an outcome that would have been so different.

Most of us have had a time when you tell a child not to do something and they turn around and do it. Or sometimes we may do that ourselves. We try to protect our children and ourselves from harm.

But maybe this unquenchable fire isn't meant to hurt. But it's meant to burn down the walls that we have built around ourselves to help us grow not only in our spirituality but in our relationship with God and with each other.

Maybe that fire is meant to lead us to a changed heart and a changed life. Maybe we need to walk through those unquenchable flames to become the people that Christ wants us to be.

[31:53] It's those hard times, the hard things that make us who we are that help us grow in love, compassion, and grace for others.

Maybe we need to look at this message as one of hope. A hope for changing of our hearts, the burning down of our walls, and the things in our life that we may be not so proud of.

Maybe we should look at verse 9 where it says, Maybe we should look at that differently.

Maybe that tree is diseased. Maybe that tree is causing harm. Maybe that tree represents the bad parts of our lives that we need to burn to be able to let the new shoots, the new roots grow and spread that's a life lived for God.

We need to tear down the self-criticism, the shame that we have that restricts our relationship with God and with others. Those walls that we put up that we guard ourselves against because things that happen in our everyday lives.

Sometimes we feel we're not good enough and it feels that if until we get better, until we do better and better, that we're not worthy of God's love. Some weeks you may feel pretty much like Saturday Night Live's Stuart Smalley who says, I'm good enough, I'm smart enough, and doggone it, people like me.

But most of us, if we're honest, probably feel, at least time to time, that we're not as good, as worthy as we strive to become. And we really will never get there.

That Christian perfection. So as some of you know, the wheat is made up of two parts, the grain and the husk. The husk is the hard outer shell, the chaff, which forms around the soft inner seed.

The seed is edible, the chaff is not. And to separate the inedible chaff from the inner seed, the grain is pounded, separating the grain from the husks, is done by winnowing.

And most often in Jesus' day, by throwing the whole lot into the air and letting the breeze blow the lighter, chaffed away. So yes, the wheat's good, the chaff is bad, right?

But not so fast. It turns out that that chaff has a purpose. It protects the seed as it grows. And maybe it's absolutely necessary for a period of time.

What if all of us are the wheat, but we all have a little bit of that chaff built up around us, possibly to protect us. But that's keeping us separated from one another and from God.

In a deeper sense, separated from our truest selves. The chaff is a collection. It's all the habits and behaviors and attitudes that we've adopted over time to protect our vulnerability, to keep us from getting hurt.

And our most valuable spots are the parts of ourselves that we aren't satisfied with. The parts of ourselves someone else or society has told us to be dissatisfied with.

Guilt or shame over things we've done or that we've left undone. The chaff is our own voice or culture's voice saying that deep down, we're just not good enough.

[35:25] Several years ago, there were changes happening in the local church that I was part of. And I was encouraged to become a CLM, a certified lay minister.

A CLM by definition is called and equipped to preach the word, care for the congregation, develop faith communities, lead small groups, or establish community outreach ministries as part of a ministry team with the supervision and support of clergy people.

I took the required classes and I became a CLM, focusing on small group ministry and caring for the congregation, as well as children and family and youth ministries.

Eight minutes, eight months after becoming a CLM and having helped with one small Bible study, I was placed in the church as a lead pastor.

I had no experience leading a church and the leadership made it very clear that they wanted a fully ordained male elder to lead their church. This caused quite a bit of conflict between the church leadership and myself and I had to find a way learning and finding people willing in that congregation to work with me.

[36:43] I felt each step I took, someone was there fighting me every step of the way. I was given a job to do and I felt that I was failing miserably, that I was maybe exaggerating the call that God had and the path that he was trying to lead me on.

I was angry in the position I was placed and I was angry with God and I was hurt and I was so critical of everything that I did and I built up so many walls and I hardened myself against allowing that hurt.

I shut down and stopped and paralyzed and what I saw were so many faults. And one day I received a text and it was late in the day and I was told I was going to meet with the church in about an hour or so.

And when I arrived, I had no idea why I was there and I was questioning my ability to serve this new congregation. And I was very guarded when I started and so afraid of what was going to happen.

And I prayed and I met some people in the congregation and I let down some of that hardness that I had built up and I felt my walls start to come down.

[37:56] I trusted and got rid of some of the doubt and I gave it to God and I started to heal. I started to build relationships and I realized that I do have gifts to share.

So in order for us to be at home with God and our faith in each other, we need to let those walls down. We need to stop the self-criticism, the doubt.

We are not alone. You are not alone. We are so loved by God and we need to share that with each other. We need to lift each other up and live our lives for God even through the difficult times, being there for each other.

God is saying to us, do not fear for I have redeemed you. I have called you by name and you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you.

When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned and the flame shall not consume you. But it's hard to hear that message, isn't it?

[39:03] I mean, really hear it. Those other voices are so loud, the ones that tell us that sure, God will love us, but only after we really earn it.

Sure, God will forgive us, but only after we prove that we are worthy. It seems like we can't quite believe that it's possible that God already loves us just as we are and we get it backwards.

We think that God will only love us after God forgives us and since we're not good enough, we can never really completely earn that forgiveness. But that's not it at all.

No matter how true those thoughts feel, God forgives us because God already loves us. All the ways that we mess up or fall short, those things are part of us being human.

They don't change the truth of God's steadfast and everlasting love. And yet it's so often hard to understand that God looks at each and every one of us and calls us his beloved.

[40:09] And we're not the only ones to feel this way. Time and time again, people need to be reassured of God's love. Even Moses and Paul struggled to believe that they were really good enough, that they could be loved and could serve God the way they were.

I take some comfort in knowing that I'm not the only one who can believe in the natural worth and lovableness of others while struggling to believe that that same can be true of me.

So what's our God to do? We've been given prophets, kings, sages. We have whole libraries of scriptures, stories and songs.

And still we just can't quite accept the love of God. So God sends us Jesus, the one who will baptize us with the Holy Spirit and fire.

The Holy Spirit, the breath of God, which will blow away the chaff that have hardened around our hearts. The Holy Spirit, the fire that burns the chaff up, using it as fuel to strengthen us as we grow in God's love.

[41:17] The water that touched our foreheads at our baptism when we were named and claimed as God's own. We have heard Luke's version of Jesus' baptism.

And one of the details I love about this passage in Luke is that we see that Jesus is not alone. This is not some private ritual held apart from the crowds.

When the dove descends and the voice comes from heaven declaring that Jesus is God's beloved, we hear that all the people were baptized. I picture a crowd of people in the river and in the middle of them is Jesus.

He's praying, as maybe many of them are as well. But he's surrounded by others who have come seeking a sign of God's love and forgiveness. God's forgiveness is full of the power to help us change.

The Greek word offices shows this. It's much stronger than the simple forgiveness. Offices is release. It carries the idea with it of the release of captives, of setting prisoners free, of smoothing out the rough places in your life, of letting go of all of the self-doubt, the self-criticism, and the shame.

[42:36] When we were baptized, we were baptized in a community of faith into a community of saints. We stood then as we stand now in a long line of people stretching before us and after us, all one human family, each and every one of us, a beloved child of God.

All of us part of not only a human family, but a holy family. One family held together by love. And each and every one of us in that family, that big community of saints, has been baptized just as Jesus was.

That's another thing that we get backwards. It's not that Jesus gets baptized like we do. The amazing thing is that we get baptized like he was.

We get to receive this visible sign that God loves us so truly, deeply, and completely, warts and all. In baptism, God proclaims God's love for us.

He calls, names, and claims us as God's loved, beloved children. He gives us the gift of the Holy Spirit. And then because of God's love for us, God also promises to forgive, renew, and restore us at all times.

[43:57] John preaches to us that to help create and build a home for all, that we need to use what Jesus taught us. Where justice and love reigns.

Where the foundation is Jesus. Where we have burned away the undesirable parts of our lives. Where you can build your life, your career, your business, relationships, by building our foundation on the foundation of the Holy Spirit.

We know it cannot fail. It will be as strong as that house that was built upon the rocks. The walls are the communication and trust that we put in place.

And then the roof is the roof of love and compassion. The plans may not be elaborate for this home, but it will take us a lifetime to construct it.

God is the designer and the general contractor. He envisioned the home and he alone can help each one of us build it. So today, I invite you to remember your baptisms and be thankful.

[45:02] We're going to remember that on that day, perhaps many, many years ago, we stood or were held when we were being baptized and a voice came from heaven saying, you are my beloved.

With you, I am well pleased. And remember that you are so loved. Thanks be to God. Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you. Let us pray.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

[47:33] Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Amen.

Amen. Family of faith. God sent prophets like John the Baptist to us because this work is not easy.

Helping create a world where all might have a home and all might be loved and all might know peace is an audacious goal. Fortunately for us when we mess up when we lose our way or forget our call we are met with grace.

God could not love us anymore or any less than God already does. So rest in this good news. We are at home with God forgiven claimed and loved.

The door is always open for us. Thanks be to God. Thanks be to God. Amen. The Lord be with you.

[48:44] And also with you. Lift up your hearts. Lift up your hearts. Lift up the Lord. Let us give thanks to the Lord our God. We give thanks to the Lord our God.

God of our salvation. We sometimes feel that we don't deserve your love and yet you lavish it on us. Not 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.

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

[49:46] 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 serve. Remember? Amen. We about to bring you back to God. Amen. And on the night in which he gave himself up for us.

Jesus took bread. He gave thanks to you. He broke the bread. And gave it to his disciples saying, Take and eat.

[50:48] This is my body. This is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me. When the supper was over, he took the cup.

He gave thanks to you. He gave it to his disciples and said, Drink from this, all of you. For this is my blood. Sign of the new covenant.

Pour it out for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins. Do this as often as you drink it in remembrance of me. And as we wait during this blessed season of Advent, we proclaim the mystery of faith.

Christ has died. Christ has risen. Christ will come again. Pour out your Holy Spirit on us gathered here, on these gifts of bread and cup.

Make them be for us the body and blood of Christ, that we may be for the world the body of Christ, redeemed by his blood. For your Spirit, make us one with Christ, one with each other, and one in ministry to all the world, until Christ comes in final victory, and we feast at his heavenly banquet.

[52:11] Through your Son, Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit, in your Holy Church, all honor and glory is yours, almighty God, now and forever.

Amen. And hear us as we pray together 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 who are serving today, please come full.

[53:48] Amen. Amen. Amen.

The table is prepared, and our Lord beckons.

He offers you what only He can give, the peace, the joy, and the love that comes from knowing Him. Commuting with Him in this special way. So prepare to receive God's gift.

Know that if you want prepackaged elements, the service can give those to you as well. Please use the center aisle, come to the front, receive your elements, and then exit by the side.

Come as the Spirit leads. Amen. Amen

[55:55] Amen. Amen.

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

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[57:54] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[60:24] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Take you. Take you.

[63:36] Take you. Take your candle. Take your candle. Take your candle. Take your candle. Take your candle.

Take your candle. Take your candle. Take your candle. Take your hand. Take your hand.

See you. Take your candle. Take your candle. Take your candle. Take your però Practice hebt She create Diese Él.

May mustaMntH função ,■ ■■■■ mother or her stuffy, You still convey. And bring you to the sky. Take your heir,meechau. Take your lookout. candle without a flame.

So carry your candle, run to the darkness. Seek out the lonely, the tired and worn.

[64:41] Hold out your candle for all to see it. Take your candle, go light your world.

Take your candle, go light your world. We are a family whose hearts are blazing.

So let's raise our candles, light up the sky. Pray to our Father in the name of Jesus.

Make us a beacon in darkest times. Carry your candle, run to the darkness.

Seek out the helpless, deceived and poor. Hold out your candle for all to see it.

[66:08] Take your candle, go light your world. So carry your candle, run to the darkness.

Seek out the hopeless, confused and torn. Hold out your candle for all to see it.

Take your candle, go light your world. Take your candle, go light your world.

Take your candle, go light your world. And our final song is the favorite joy to the world.

And there is joy in knowing that Jesus came for us and will come again. Let Him go again. Let us pray.

[67:47] Let us pray.

Let us pray. Let us pray. Let us pray. Let us pray.

Let us pray. Let us pray. May your love overflow, rich and wholesome in the world.

May you be found pure and blameless, having prepared a way and a place in the Lord for your hearts. May you reap the bountiful harvest of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ.

To the glory and praise of God. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

[69:05] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.