

First Trinity Lutheran Church
John 2:13-22
March 11, 2012

Where Do You Call Home?

What comes to your mind when you hear the word *home*? What does it mean to be at home? Who is there? Who do you want to be there? What happens when you are home? Many of us even though we have lived here a long time have another place that we call home. In fact in this congregation on Thanksgiving and Christmas many of you go home for the holidays.

Home is one of those foundational realities that we each carry around with us, so important that our memories of home continue to shape who we are, even if we've been gone from home for years. The stories, the ancestors, the rituals. And it's not just happy or nostalgic memories in fact some of them can be fairly painful memories.

Home is so important that many of us will, at certain times of the year, make elaborate, even expensive trips back home in order to participate in the rituals and the relationships of what we call "home." If those relationships are healthy and joyous, then so is home; if not, then home is something that must be endured, or maybe even avoided.

This morning in his gospel, John tells a story that begins with an elaborate, even expensive trip. It was a requirement of every Jew to make three annual pilgrimages to Jerusalem in order to participate in the religious rituals at the heart of Israel's faith. Persons who made the journey to participate in worship at the temple would be expected to sacrifice an animal in accordance with the Law given by Moses. Now, you might think that your crazy relatives make things difficult on you whenever you come to visit, but the temple sacrificial system made it very difficult on worshippers, and generated lots of income for those who were in charge.

The Law of Moses required the sacrifice of animals to atone for the sins of the individual who was making the sacrifice. Jews would come from all over the world to the temple to offer up their sacrifices to God. And rather than bring their own goat or lamb with them over the long and perilous journey, they'd buy them when they got to the temple. Why? Because the stipulation for an animal to be sacrificed was that it be of a certain age, and without blemish. So, if you decided to bring an animal with you on the trip there was the possibility that the animal might become damaged or scared and the temple inspectors would say "no, doesn't pass muster." This is why the vendors and money-changers were there as well. It was all for the sake of convenience so that the proper sacrifices could be made and buying an animal at the temple forced them to pay an incredible mark-up for the convenience. Furthermore if you carried money that had the image of Caesar engraved upon the coins they were not accepted at the temple. The temple did not honor Roman currency so you had to exchange your coins with those inside the temple as a steep loss. Those of you who traveled overseas and exchanged currency will know about this mark up. This is what a Jew had to go through in order to make their sacrifice. All of this was done to fulfill the Law of Moses.

Such a system was expensive even for the wealthy-for the poor it was nearly impossible. Here was this moment of great ritual that was at the center of Israel's communal life but the hardship made the whole trip almost unbearable. This should have been a wonderful time to remember, to tell stories, to sing songs, to share special foods, to participate in those rituals and relationships that make a place a home, yet there was this system that obscured what God intended. The temple was God's home, the place where the relationship between God and Israel was renewed-but a strange economy or

one could say greed had gotten in the way. Into this mess of animals and people of money and exchange comes Jesus. Jesus takes a stand and with a whip he drives out the animals; he dumps the tables of coins; he runs the pigeon salesmen off, including the animals and said "Take all this away, don't make the house of my Father a market place.

We hear this story and think that Jesus is angry because the temple folks are ripping off those good people making the trip for the feast. That is true to some extent, but according to John, Jesus is doing something else. Jesus is cleaning out the temple of all the things that have turned wrong, and if that's not enough instead of sacrificing those animals he makes himself the sacrifice. Jesus puts himself in the place of the temple and if they try and stop him, in three days he will rise again. Now as Jesus spoke these words nobody understood what he was talking about they thought Jesus was talking about rebuilding the temple even before it has been fully rebuilt. But later after Jesus' resurrection the disciples realized what he meant that now everyone can enter the temple of God, everyone can enter in God's home through Jesus.

The temple in Jerusalem like any church, synagogue, or mosque in the world today cannot contain God. Why then come to church? Because at worship we can hear God's word proclaimed in a way that helps us see and experience God in all of life. Here we learn that God is everywhere. Here we experience God's beloved community in all its shapes and forms. It is here that we are challenged in our faith and challenged to see, identify and partner with God in the world not just here in this space but outside these doors where the people are.

Where Jesus is, God's love is found. Where Jesus is, God's freedom and power are found. Jesus brings us under God's roof with our very own room, to rescue us from the

slavery of sin. So now where is God's home? Where does God live? God's home is where Jesus is and where Jesus is that's where the true church is. So often we substitute a strange economy, thinking that we must first placate God before he will love us or let us in, that we must earn or at least barter our way into God's house. Jesus has endured the cross, so that we may enter without cost. As we continue to make our Lenten journey, let us remember that because of Jesus we are always at home in the Lord Amen.