

A PLACE TO CALL HOME



My Dear Friends,

We live in a world of homeless people. They are not only the ones who live in the alleys, vacant houses and shelters but also those who abide in the condos, the three bedroom houses, and even the mansions. We live in a culture of displaced people.

How many have a house they can go home to yet they wander the streets night after night searching for peace, a sense of belonging, and a place they can call home. Others have a house but instead of being a place of hospitality, a resting place, it has become a war zone.

In order to understand this place called home we need to go back to the beginning of time. There we read, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters” (Gen.1:1, 2). What a mess. Yet these two verses from Scripture describe what many are experiencing today in an attempt to create a home. When they finally get that place instead of experiencing a place where they have peace, purpose, and acceptance what they seem to get is further chaos, emptiness and darkness.

In Genesis 1 and 2 we see God making a home for all of His creation. It is a place of harmony, rest, relationship, a place of embodied habitation called the Garden of Eden. There we find man and woman living in peace with birds, animals, and all the rest of creation.

But something happened. Adam and Eve let Satan, the embodiment of evil, cause them to question God’s goodness, and His ability to provide them with a home. Every home has rules. The one rule in their home was don’t eat from the tree in the middle of the garden. Well instead of obeying God they listen to Satan and eat from that tree. The moment Adam and Eve did that it becomes clear they had disobeyed God and they tried to hide from His presence. This starts the process, which actually caused them to be displaced from their home, the Garden of Eden.

“Home. Homelessness. Long for home. Ours is a culture of displacement, exile, and homelessness. Socioeconomic homelessness is growing with many people seeking adequate housing. Ecological homelessness is increasing, with its sense of alienation from a degraded and defiled earth. And a profound spiritual homelessness is increasing, with its sense of alienation from a degraded and defiled earth. And a profound spiritual homelessness pervades postmodern culture, so that for an increasing number of people today, the experience of the world as home, as a place where we know the rules and responsibilities of the house is lost. A nomadic homelessness dominates the contemporary horizon.” This quote from Beyond Homeless, a work by Steven Bouma – Prediger and Brian J. Walsh sum up the state of homelessness for much of humanity.

The Biblical story is the story of a people seeking a home, a place, and a purpose. Abraham is to be a father of a great nation with a home in the land of Canaan. In later years his descendants end up in slavery in Egypt. The story of the Exodus is the story of these people (the children of Israel) being liberated from the slavery of homeless (Ex 16) and then traveling to their homeland. Whether it is in the wilderness or in the Promise Land we see that the reality of home takes place only when the children of Israel are living in the reality of the presence of God.

God creates a home, a place of acceptance, and belonging. Sin destroys, displaces and uproots. God redeems, restores and reunites our homeless lives to His Son, the Homecoming King Jesus Christ. He heals, restores and declares, “The Kingdom of God is at hand” (Luke 10:9, 11). Through His death and resurrection He demonstrates, He is “the Way, the truth and the Life” (John 14:6). The One who “has gone to prepare a place for us,” Jesus not only makes it possible for us to come to our Heavenly Father but through the power of the Holy Spirit infuses us with purpose and a sense of belonging.

None of this makes sense to a secular humanistic society where commercialism is god and displacement is considered normal. Wendell Berry explains that, “our present leaders – people of wealth and power – do not know what it means to take place seriously; to think it worthy, for its own sake, of love and careful work. They cannot take any place seriously become they must be ready at any moment, by the terms of power and wealth in the modern world, to destroy any place.”

That is why the work of New Life Evangelistic Center is so counter cultural. It sees all human beings as individuals who are created in the image of God and in need of a place they can feel at home. It believes, as the Scripture says, that “God

places the lonely in families” (Ps 68:6). This family is the New Life Evangelistic Center Community where individuals are challenged to live out their God given calling or purpose. NLEC by its very efforts to provide a home within the Biblical context is considered a threat to the shallow government claims of ending chronic homelessness by placing a few in shelter without purpose and the reality of the presence of God.

This is perhaps best illustrated by Gary, a former Vietnam War Veteran. Gary was in his early forties when he came to the New Life Evangelistic Center. He was homeless man who was tired of searching for a place he could call home. When he came to the doors of NLEC for the first time he thought he was coming to a place he would only find shelter. What he found was an opportunity to become a part of the New Life family and a place to call home. Gary’s new home was a place of residence, a resting place, a place to create memories, a place of hospitality, a place for order, acceptance, and a sense of belonging. As a leader at NLEC’s New Bloomfield renewable energy center Gary not only lived with a sense of purpose but he transferred that to other previously homeless people as well. Most importantly of all Gary had allowed himself to be awoken to the power and presence of God.

In his new home Gary had learned not only how to live but also to die. As Gary neared his fiftieth birthday his heart began to fail him to the point his doctor and nurse encouraged him to move into hospice. But Gary had found his home and did not want to leave. He continued to work in the NLEC renewable energy center as long as he could. Then when he could no longer work the men took turns caring for him in his bedroom.

After years of wandering the deserts of life Gary had finally found a home where he could not only live by faith but also die. Surrounded by brothers who had also been homeless Gary had received the home that the love of Christ provides. Bouma – Prediger and Walsh explain it this way in their book Beyond Homelessness. “When the homeless recognize that the resurrected one is the gardener of the new creation, the new Adam (John 20:15; 1 Cor. 15:45; Romans 5:12-21). When they follow and confess this Jesus as Lord, the one who was rendered homeless on a Roman cross and resurrected with homemaking power on the third day (Matt. 28; Luke 24; Mark 16; John 20). When they recognize that this Jesus is the image of the invisible God and that in Him all of creation is redeemed and humanity is called to be renewed and restored as God’s homemaking image – bearers, embodying in their lives the homemaking virtues of compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, patience forgiveness and love (Col. 1:15-20; 3:10,12-14). When the peace of this Christ rules in their hearts and the word of Christ dwells in them so richly and so

deeply that they begin to shape dwellings (homes) of hospitality, justice, and shalom” (Col. 3:15-16; Eph 2: 11-22).

All of us long for that perfect home among perfect people. Yet even in the best of situations where we desire to be home makes rather than home breakers, chaos and confusion all too frequently seem to reign supreme. At moments like that instead of giving up we need to once again return to Gen. 1:2 where in the midst of the chaos and empty darkness, the spirit hovered over such, resulting in order and creation. Letting the Holy Spirit hover involves first submitting our demands in community life to the Risen Christ and then trusting Him to allow His love to flow through us even to those we don't feel deserve such love.

Gary had discovered the power of prayer, faith, compassion, relationships and hope in the setting of a home. Now as he faced death he knew he was simply getting ready for his eternal home. He had spent his life being uprooted and rooted, traveling to that eternal home where death, mourning and crying will be no more. Through the Resurrected Christ in Rev. 21:3, 4 we see that homecoming is promised to all who will dare to believe. “See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them as their God; they will be His people, and God Himself will be with them; He will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying will be no more, for the first things have passed away.”

We see all around us the brokenness of earth, which is the brokenness of God's home. Sin defiles and distorts not only God's home but also the homes of His people. Yet in the middle of such distortion and brokenness we see God recreating, remaking, regenerating and redeeming through the sending of His son who declares, “The time has come. The Kingdom of God” (and the home He provides) “is near. Repent and believe the good news” (Mark 1:15).

The Kingdom of God is near. It is here. Jesus with the out stretched hands of the waiting Father invites the prodigals, the displaced, the lost and the lonely with the words, “Come unto me all you who are overwhelmed, homeless, and frustrated and I will give you rest. I will provide a home, a place of refuge for you.” In order to experience this we must repent from believing the lies of Satan. Scripture says he is that roaring lion who walks around seeking someone to devour through unbelief, hopelessness, and despair. We must repent from trading God's shelter of love for the deserts and deceptions this world offers.

Jesus says, “I am going to prepare a place for you.”(John 14:2). Will you believe the good news He is sharing with you? Will you accept the fact He

demonstrated His love for you by dieing on a cross for your sins? Or will you insist on journeying through life with no place for your heart to call home and no purpose you can call your own? The decision is yours. The opportunity is now.

Not only does Christ invite you to experience the hope of your heavenly home but he also invites you during your journey on this earth to be a part of His community of fellow believers called the body of Christ. Such a community is where Christ's interactive love is at work. This community provides the roots, which Simeone Weil describes. "To be rooted is perhaps the most important and least recognized need of the human soul. It is one of the hardest to define. A human being has roots by virtue of his real, active, and natural participation in the life of a community which preserves in living shape certain particular treasures of the past and certain particular expectations for the future."

For over 38 years New Life Evangelistic Center has sought through the grace of God to provide a rooted place for the homeless and hurting. A place where the love of Jesus Christ can give them roots, direction, and purpose. A place to call home is the heart's desire. A home which transforms one from being a tumble weed blowing across the dry terrain into a tree rooted in the love, power and purpose that Christ provides.

Robert Frost in his work Death of the Hired Man wrote, "Home is the place when you have to go there, they have to take you." Don't you think its time you came home and settled down in God's love? You can do this as you surrender your heart filled with wanderlust to the one who has a home created for you. Let Him now fill you with the peace that passes all understanding which comes from knowing He has a place called home prepared for you both now and for all eternity.

Yours in Christ

Larry Rice