

September 4th, 2022 • Come Home to God • Holy Communion • In-Person and Online Worship

“Come Home to God”

Homily by Rev. Patricia Farris



Luke 24:13-35

Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. And he said to them, “What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?” They stood still, looking sad. Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, “Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?” He asked them, “What things?” They replied, “The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place. Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, and when they did not find his body there, they came back and told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive. Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but they did not see him.” Then he said to them, “Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?” Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures. As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. But they urged him strongly, saying, “Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over.” So he went in to stay with them. When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. They said to each other, “Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?” That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. They were saying, “The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!” Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

Our theme for this new month of September is Come Home—Come Home to God, Come Home to Church, Come Home to the Earth, Come Home to Transform the World.

The hunger for home sums up our deepest longings. It pulls us backward and forward at once. Whether we’re trying to find our way back home or looking for a home we’ve never known, the hunger for home is both memory and imagination, restoration and transformation.

As a new school year begins, some activities picking back up, and even though it feels like summer is back with a vengeance as we sizzle under this Heat Dome, still, it’s a good time to reflect a bit on our priorities, on where our life is going, and see if we might not want to recalibrate our lives a bit. Where are we going? How do we want to be shaped and formed? Who do we want to become? How do our hearts find home?

There is scientific data to suggest that worshipping together actually resets the neurons in us. That prayer, singing, praise, and sacraments, shared together, have the capacity to disrupt and derail negative inertias that get stuck in our hearts and minds—fears, insecurities, biases, and prejudices that cause us to pull away from one another. Worship creates a new home for us all.

We start today at the heart of it all—Come Home to God. Let’s come home to the God who gives us life, who loves us into the fullness of life, who sends us out in love to serve the world, the God who, at the end of our days on this earth, loves us into life beyond our imagining. Come Home to God.

The great writer, Frederick Buechner, who died just recently, once wrote: “Faith is homesickness. Faith is a lump in the throat. Faith is less a position on than a movement toward.” It is sensing a presence...

The story we heard Ron read from the Gospel of Luke is a story we usually hear just after Easter. After the crucifixion, the death of Jesus, and the empty tomb, the disciples are trying to make sense of it all, to understand what had happened, and to begin to comprehend what it would mean for their lives. Two of them, walking to the village of Emmaus, encountered a stranger who didn't seem to know about everything that had happened. So, they told him, saying "we had hoped," (past tense, notice), "we had hoped that he was the One to redeem us." And then the stranger rehearsed for them the trajectory of faith from Moses and the prophets to the Messiah. He was inviting them to return to their Scriptures, and come home to the stories of their faith.

It was Jesus there with them, but their eyes couldn't yet identify their Risen Lord. They walked on until it was evening and they invited the stranger home with them to have supper. As we've seen, Jesus is the herald of the home of God. And so, gathered there around the table, Jesus becomes the host. He transforms their home into the home of God. He took bread, and blessed it and broke it, and gave it to them. And their eyes were opened. Ah yes, they seemed to say, "were not our hearts burning within us when he was talking with us on the road and opening the Scripture to us?"

So now, eyes focused, hearts pounding with love and joy, with a lump in their throats, they press on in the movement forward. They run to tell the others of the faith they have found. Inviting him into their home, Christ invites them to Come Home to God.

Whether you are worshipping online today or here in-person, I invite you to open your heart to experience the presence of the living God through this sacrament of Holy Communion. Just as if you were at table with Jesus.

He was known to them in the breaking of the bread, as he has been to us, spreading the balm of grace. Here at table, God invites us to pause for rest and renewal. In this holy space, we will find a safe place to bring our fear and frustrations. As did the first disciples, we, too, can wrestle with all that within us that is unexplainable, unanswerable. And undoubtedly, if we open our hearts, we will discover endless grace. Holy Communion is a lens into the core of who we are, a pathway to the discovery of our true self. Holy Communion invites us to begin again to practice a way of life—love and justice, justice and joy!—that flows from the words and actions of Christ and the life of the Spirit within us.

Come Home to God. I pray that you'll find a table where the Spirit can speak to your heart, and open your eyes, and re-set your soul, and surround you with the light of God's love and fill you with peace. Come home to the God who gives us life, who loves us into the fullness of life, who sends us out in love to serve the world, the God who, at the end of our days on this earth, loves us into life beyond our imagining. Come Home to God.

Thanks be to God. AMEN

Notes:

Buechner quoted in David Brooks "The Man Who Found His Inner Depths," August 19, 2022, *New York Times*.

Matthew Croasmun and Miroslav Wolf. *The Hunger for Home: Food and Meals in the Gospel of Luke*. Baylor University Press, 2022.

W. David O. Taylor, "Hymns and Neurons: How Worship Rewires Our Brains and Bonds Us Together." August 29, 2022, *Christianity Today*.

Laura Buchanan. "Step away to a holy place--Find a place of refuge, a sanctuary, where brokenness is welcome and God's healing is real." August 8, 2022, *United Methodist News Service*.

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