

“Mobile Homes”
Matthew 17:1-8
Rev. Chris Mereschuk
Transfiguration Sunday
February 19, 2023

Prayer...

I used to dream of living in a mobile home. Not one of those huge, bus-sized RV's that retirees drive to National Parks, but like a smaller one. Maybe even a conversion van.

I liked the idea of not owning much, not having too much stuff weighing me down. I liked the idea of being able to just pick up and go whenever and wherever I wanted to — maybe being some kind of modern day circuit preacher: going from church to church, bringing a word, helping out for a while, and then onto the next place when things got too dull or too complicated.

This escapist fantasy of mine was, of course, in direct contradiction to both the realities of life and my deep-seated longing for stability. The reality part sets in when you recognize the need for friends and support networks and things like — oh, say — a fixed address, steady income, health insurance. And then a kid enters your life and you become a parent? Well, forget fitting all of that kid's stuff into a conversion van — never mind that it barely fits into a huge moving van! And yes, between hobbies and books and sentimental keepsakes and various “needful things,” I have a tendency to accumulate tons of “stuff,” too.

And that sense of stability, the longing to have someplace to call home, the familiar surroundings, the security of some predictability in a chaotic and unpredictable world: it seems to be some kind of human instinct to belong somewhere, establish an identity and put down some roots.

So, no more mobile home, vagabond preacher fantasy for me.

Of course, you can live in a house and not ever feel like it's truly your home. And you can find yourself a home, and for one reason or another need to uproot and establish another home. And while economics factors such as massive student debt, high costs of housing, and jobs that pay below a living wage compel many younger

generations to move back “home” after college or into early adulthood, just as many Gen-Xers and Millennials move or relocate frequently — once every 2 to 4 years, with nearly 70% of folks moving more than 10 miles from childhood homes.¹

It seems that each emerging generation has become more and more mobile or more and more transient, and this concept of one’s home or hometown is in flux. Indeed, when I ask my friends — especially those a bit younger than me — where “home” is for them, some respond with the town of their childhood — unless their parents have moved from there or passed away. For others, they can’t necessarily identify one town or another as their childhood home because their own childhood was marked by mobility: family moves because of work, or military service, or even foster care.

And then other folks will identify the place they live right now as their home, which sometimes translates to being the place where you keep your stuff rather than a deep sense of belonging someplace.

With so much mobility, with the need to remain flexible and adaptable, with economic uncertainty and life’s overall unpredictability, maybe that sense of “home” needs to be more of an internal thing. Maybe that concept of establishing one’s roots and “settling down” is an artifact of bygone times, one that was not so much universally true as romanticized notions might have us believe.

I suppose that it’s true that home is where you make it, and home is where the heart is — and our hearts are mobile.

Six days after foretelling of his death and resurrection and the coming Son of Man, Jesus took the Disciples Peter, James, and John with him to a mountain top.

There before the three men, Jesus was transfigured, and “his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white.” And there, next to Jesus, appeared Moses and Elijah, representing the law and the prophets, in conversation with the Lord.

¹ <https://www.housingwire.com/articles/49822-younger-generations-are-moving-more-than-others/> and <https://www.forbes.com/sites/zackfriedman/2019/06/06/millennials-move-back-home-college/#1418e440638a>

Out of instinct and devout faithfulness, Peter responded — maybe reacted — to this holy moment, exclaiming, “Lord, it is good for us to be here; if you wish, I will make three dwellings here, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.”

Then, as if to say, “Hush, Peter — no one was asking you to chime in!” a bright cloud surrounded them and a voice broke forth: “This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; *listen to him!*”

This heavenly proclamation was an echo of the words that resounded as Jesus emerged from the waters of his baptism: “This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.”² But this time the voice — presumably the voice of God — emphatically added, “Listen to him!”

Peter was talking and not listening. In both Mark’s and Luke’s Gospels, the writers make Peter look a little more foolish, adding that Peter blurted out the dwelling place offer because he was terrified and did not know what to say.³ In Matthew, God interrupts the interrupter, and reminds him that it is often more important, even more holy, to listen.

Yet, how very human of Peter to respond with his desire to both honor and preserve, even capture, the moment. And how very human — perhaps with an emphasis on *man* — how very human of Peter to speak out of turn instead of listening. How very human of Peter to desire the security of a dwelling place, a home.

We know, if only in our minds, that God cannot be contained, that Jesus cannot be boxed in or locked up in one dwelling place or another — yet so far that has not stopped faithful people from trying.

We know, if only in our minds, that to follow Jesus means that we must follow him wherever he may be and wherever he may call us; that discipleship means going beyond our familiar spiritual homes, setting aside security and predictability, maybe even as we long for that comfort. For as Jesus at once proclaimed and lamented:

² Matthew 3:17

³ Mark 9:6; Luke 9:33

“Foxes have dens, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.”⁴

And we know, if only in our minds, the word of caution from the Apostle Paul that we are not to be “conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of [our] minds.”⁵ And we might even know the words of the authors of the Letter to the Hebrews and First Peter, who remind us that this current world is not our eternal home, that this world is not permanent, and that we are awaiting another world yet-to-come.⁶

We might know these things in our heads, but it is another thing to know them in our hearts.

Whatever earthly, material homes we create here on Earth will pass away: paint will peel, roofs will leak, walls will crack, foundations will crumble — but God’s home is among mortals. Wherever they may be, so, too, is God. For God’s home is in the hearts of all who believe.

In the days when the Israelites did not have a homeland, when the nomadic tribes moved from place to place, before there was yet a temple or a tabernacle, God commanded the people to inscribe the covenant on their hearts, to engrave God’s steadfast love on their souls.⁷

In time, the People of Israel established a home, and the great King David had it in his mind to finally build a home for God — How very human, how very much like Peter: “Lord, I will make for you a dwelling place!”⁸

David fixed his mind on building a temple, saying, “See now, I am living in a house of cedar, but the ark of God stays in a tent.” But the Lord spoke to the Prophet Nathan:

Go and tell my servant David: Thus says the Lord: Are you the one to build me a house to live in? 6 I have not lived in a house since the day I brought up the people

⁴ Matthew 8:20; Luke 9:58

⁵ Romans 12:2

⁶ Paraphrase of Hebrews 13:14-6 & 1 Peter 2:11-12; Message uses “home.”

⁷ Exodus 13:9; Deuteronomy 11:18; Proverbs 3:3, 6:21, 7:3

⁸ Paraphrase and out-of-context: Matthew 17:4

*of Israel from Egypt to this day, but I have been moving about in a tent and a tabernacle. 7 Wherever I have moved about among all the people of Israel, did I ever speak a word with any of the tribal leaders of Israel, whom I commanded to shepherd my people Israel, saying, "Why have you not built me a house of cedar?"*⁹

God reminded King David that the Lord did not need or want a home. Wherever God's people wandered, there, too, was God's home.

That matter was different when David's son Solomon was king: "In the four hundred eightieth year after the Israelites came out of the land of Egypt, in the fourth year of Solomon's reign over Israel, in the month of Ziv, which is the second month, [Solomon] began to build the house of the Lord."¹⁰

This first temple stood in Jerusalem until the Babylonian empire sacked the city in 598 BCE, destroying the temple a decade later in 587 BCE. The armies of King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon pillaged the temple, stealing all of the sacred objects, removing the bronze pillars, and burned the temple to the ground along with the palace and other great houses.¹¹

The people of the country were taken captive and sent into exile in Babylon. The people were left without a homeland, without a home, and the home they had built for God was no more.

And yet God was still with them in exile, speaking through the prophets. Jeremiah proclaimed the coming of a new covenant. Not a covenant inscribed on stone, but written on their hearts.¹²

The Prophet Ezekiel was with the people in exile, and his other-worldly visions shared the hope of a restored home, again emphasizing God's dwelling within the people's hearts: "I will give them one heart, and put a new spirit within them; I will remove the heart of stone from their flesh and give them a heart of flesh."¹³

⁹ 2 Samuel 7:1-7

¹⁰ 1 Kings 6:1

¹¹ 2 Kings 24, 25

¹² Jeremiah 31, esp. v33

¹³ Ezekiel 11:19, 36:26

After 70 years in exile, the people of Israel returned to their homeland, and began rebuilding the great temple in Jerusalem. Jesus knew this temple, he visited and taught at this temple. He also critiqued and spoke of the impermanence of this temple. And in the year 70 AD, the occupying Roman Empire destroyed this second temple.

Whether they were written while that Second Temple stood or after it was destroyed, the Christian Scriptures from the earliest of Pauls' letters to the Gospels to the later epistles and the Book of Revelation all testify that God's home is among mortals — wherever they may be — and that God's law of love is written on the hearts of those who believe, and in our hearts, God will dwell.

Our human desire for a settled home — a stable, predictable, tangible container — leads us to project this same desire on God: "It is good that we are here! Let us make a dwelling place!"

But God desires to dwell in the mobile home of our hearts. So let our hearts be transformed and transfigured so that we might carry God with us wherever we call home.

Amen.