

Time to Go Home

Come Home for Christmas: Part 1 “Come Home for Christmas”

Rev. Cameron D St. Michael – November 28, 2021

1st Sunday of Advent

Readings: Jeremiah 33:14-16; 1 Thessalonians 3:9-13; Luke 21:25-36

Reflection: Psalm 25:1-10

Greeting: Glory to God in the highest. And on earth peace, good will toward men! (*Luke 2:14*)

Prayer: O God everlasting, the prophets spoke your word so the path to your salvation could be made known with the message of repentance. Be with us this day and prepare our hearts to receive your love. Strengthen us in faith that we may celebrate the birth of our Savior. Warm our hearts to welcome our Emmanuel, God with us. Let your hope, peace, joy, and love be the light that guide us, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Reflection: Psalm 25

To you, O LORD, I lift up my soul. O my God, in you I trust; do not let me be put to shame; do not let my enemies exult over me. Do not let those who wait for you be put to shame; let them be ashamed who are wantonly treacherous. Make me to know your ways, O LORD; teach me your paths. Lead me in your truth, and teach me, for you are the God of my salvation; for you I wait all day long. Be mindful of your mercy, O LORD, and of your steadfast love, for they have been from of old. Do not remember the sins of my youth or my transgressions; according to your steadfast love remember me, for your goodness' sake, O LORD! Good and upright is the LORD; therefore he instructs sinners in the way. He leads the humble in what is right, and teaches the humble his way. All the paths of the LORD are steadfast love and faithfulness, for those who keep his covenant and his decrees.

(Psalm 25:1-10 NRSV)*

We read the words of Psalm 25 and hear of hope in the Lord. In this season of Advent, how do you express your hope in Christ? In what ways do God's steadfast love transform you? How do you share the hope that you carry in preparation for the Christmas celebration? How can we come together in love to celebrate God with us? How can we come together to share the light?

Prayer: In this season of preparation, we praise your constant presence in our lives, O Lord. Help us to celebrate the joy that you have brought into our world. Help us to recognize our home with you and may we treat each other as family at your table. May we find hope as we follow our Risen Savior, born into this world to make us free. We raise up our prayers to you this day that you may comfort, guide, and lead us into the light of your love. Amen.

Now let the words of our mouths, and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

Sermon:

Our scripture readings for today come from the New Revised Standard Version Bible. Our first reading for today comes from Jeremiah chapter 33 verses 14 through 16.

The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah. In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David; and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will live in safety. And this is the name by which it will be called: "The Lord is our righteousness." (Jeremiah 33:14-16 NRSV)*

Our next reading for today comes from 1 Thessalonians chapter 3 verses 9 through 13.

How can we thank God enough for you in return for all the joy that we feel before our God because of you? Night and day we pray most earnestly that we may see you face to face and restore whatever is lacking in your faith. Now may our God and Father himself and our Lord Jesus direct our way to you. And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, just as we abound in love for you. And may he so strengthen your hearts in holiness that you may be blameless before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints. (1 Thessalonians 3:9-13 NRSV)*

Our last reading for today comes from Luke chapter 21 verses 25 through 36.

"There will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars, and on the earth distress among nations confused by the roaring of the sea and the waves. People will faint from fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then they will see 'the Son of Man coming in a cloud' with power and great glory. Now when these things begin to take place, stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near." Then he told them a parable: "Look at the fig tree and all the trees; as soon as they sprout leaves you can see for yourselves and know that summer is already near. So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near. Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all things have taken place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away. "Be on guard so that your hearts are not weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of this life, and that day does not catch you unexpectedly, like a trap. For it will come upon all who live on the face of the whole earth. Be alert at all times, praying that you may have the strength to escape all these things that will take place, and to stand before the Son of Man." (Luke 21:25-36 NRSV)*

This is the word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God.

Today begins our Advent and Christmas series and the series is called "Come Home for Christmas." This week's message is "Time to Go Home." Now what does it mean that it's time to go home? I won't be speaking about traveling to wherever you may have been born or

wherever your family resides for the holidays, or those coming to you, but instead our spiritual home. Coming home to God, into the family of Christ. And we start with a message about knowing what time it is, that it is time to go home. A reminder. Now, in preparation for this sermon, I watched an old favorite Christmas movie of mine: A Christmas Carol. And I had to watch my favorite version, in which George C. Scott plays Ebenezer Scrooge. And I consider this to be one of the most Christian Christmas movies that I watch every year. Now one might say that the movie is not about the birth of Christ. It barely mentions scripture at all throughout the movie. How can that be the most Christian Christmas movie I watch? I would say it's because it's about a journey of hope, in which Ebenezer Scrooge is invited to come home. I was reminded of this because it reminded me of the readings that we have for today because our readings that we have for today talk about what time it is. The prophet Jeremiah looks forward to the day when a branch of David will be raised up. We hear it in our gospel reading, that you're called to know what time it is by looking to the signs that we see. To be on guard that our hearts are weighed down. We have the call in Thessalonians, that we abound and increase in love. That Jesus directs us on our way. And they all came together for me in this story about a man who had lost his way. A man tempted by building wealth and gathering up things on earth to the point that he forgot about what was important. A man who has a vision, a vision of how he had lived his life. Of the things he was missing out on. And the future he would have without love in his life, without the spirit of Christmas. I realized how well it matched up with all of our readings and our message for today. Because when we think about what time it is, in some ways, it's always the same time. Time to turn to Christ. Time to follow. Time to come home. And of the fellowship that we have in Christ.

Because one of the themes that we get with talking about the end times is about being ready. And how can we be ready? I was reminded of that again in A Christmas Carol. By keeping the spirit of Christmas with us all through the year. But what does that mean? To me it means taking the joy that we have in the Christmas celebration, the birth of our Emmanuel, God with us. Not over us but with us, in our midst, in our hearts. His presence in our daily lives, in our actions, in our words, because Christmas brings out the best in us. Because Christmas reminds us of God taking on human form. Fully human and fully divine, walking this earth, speaking with our voice, feeling with our hands, knowing our joy and our sorrow, God with us. It inspires us to be more generous. It inspires us to be in a spirit of giving, a spirit of loving, a spirit of caring. We sing songs of the joy that it brings to our hearts. We give gifts for the sake of giving so that others may know the depths of our love. That we take extra time to show how much we care. We do all the things that remind us of the generosity and the love that our Savior has shown to us, so that we may love one another, fully and completely. That we may welcome Christ into our hearts so that Christ can welcome us home.

I think the reason that this movie reminded me so much of these readings is that we could focus so much on the future and about waiting. But it's not about waiting. It's about doing. We aren't called to patiently wait to see the far-off day when all things will be made right but to

be active to make that our home now, the best that we can. To be generous, to be loving, to seek justice, to seek righteousness everywhere. That none may be forgotten, and none left out in the cold. Because all are called to come home. I'm reminded of the way that Scrooge changes in that story, because he changes how he lives. Not just on one day but on every day. Every day remembering that life is a blessing. Every day remembering that wealth is meant to be shared. Scrooge goes about and he makes friends using that wealth, giving to the poor, helping those in need, helping his friends, helping his family, enjoying their company in kindness and mercy and in love. For me, that's the message of Christmas. The reminder of what time it is and to prepare not for some far off day, not for some future event that we patiently wait for, but an event that we seek by going and doing. By being the love that the world needs. By sharing the hope that we carry in our hearts. By loving our neighbor as ourselves and giving our hearts over to Christ completely so that we may love completely. Because Christmas is about doing the unexpected, whether it be giving a gift that shows our generosity, sharing our time with others to show that they matter, or God coming into this world in human form to show us his love. All can be unexpected, and all can be joyous blessings if we recognize what time it is.

Because too often we sit on our hands, and we wait. Wait for somebody else to make the move, wait for somebody else to show us the way. But someone has shown us the way by going out and proclaiming the good news and proclaiming that the good news is for all people. That we may be thankful for all the hope that we have been given. That we know that God restores our faith when it falters, that God's love is there for us at all times, ready to help us to overcome any obstacle, giving us the strength that we need to do the right thing and to be the people that we know we can be so that we can invite others to know what time it is. Time to celebrate. Time to love. Time to care. That we keep alert not by sitting and watching and waiting but by going and doing. By being the love that we want others to experience. By showing the generosity that Christ has shown us. By being a people who do not just preach love and mercy, but a people who give it and give it abundantly.

I'm once again reminded of A Christmas Carol. That when we show those things, we find life and find it in abundance, and we give life, and we give it in abundance. Because Christ has given life to us. Because that is the hope, the hope that I find at Christmas, that always makes me want to be able to love more and to do more. That it makes me want to be the kindness, to be the mercy, to be the grace, to be the love in this world that I want to see. So that I may give hope to others in Christ's name. So that all may feel welcome in that heavenly home. That all may feel welcome in Christ's family. That it always represents a place of peace, a place of joy, a place of love, and a place of hope for all people. So that whenever any of us thinks of Christ, that we know what time it is. Not just that it's time to go home, but it's time that we recognized we have a home where we all are loved, and all belong. For that hope is one of the great miracles of Christmas. Amen.

Prayer of Confession and Pardon: O Lord, the God who saw fit to walk with us, we thank you that you judge us not by the perfection of our actions. We know that we fall short, both in what we do and what we fail to do. Help us, as individuals and as a congregation, to trust you and follow where you lead. Help us to proclaim the Good News and to live it. Help us in our weakness and forgive us. May we remember your love and redemption are forever with us, born to call us home. Amen.

Offering: If you are so moved to make an offering, you may send it to the church treasurer, or you may send it to the PO Box listed below. We are still the church, and the church still needs your support to keep doing all the important work that we do.

Lord's Prayer

Dismissal with Blessing: May we go forth reflecting God's love in our lives as we go forth in the peace of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Our Current Series – Come Home for Christmas

Our Advent/Christmas series is *Come Home for Christmas*. Advent is an invitation to celebrate Christ coming into the world, a reminder that God is with us. We celebrate the longing for God's kin-dom, the true home in God we hope for. The invitation for all is this: Come home for Christmas.

November 28th – *Time to Go Home* – Jeremiah 33:14-16; 1 Thess. 3:9-13; Luke 21:25-36

December 5th – *The Fear of Home* – Malachi 3:1-4; Philippians 1:3-11; Luke 3:1-6

December 12th – *The Joy of Home* – Zephaniah 3:14-20; Philippians 4:4-7; Luke 3:7-18

December 19th – *The Blessing of Home* – Micah 5:2-5a; Hebrews 10:5-10; Luke 1:39-45

December 24th – *Welcome Home* – Isaiah 9:2-7; Titus 2:11-14; Luke 2:1-20

December 26th – *Lost at Home* – 1 Samuel 2:18-20, 26; Colossians 3:12-17; Luke 2:41-52

January 2nd – *The Light of Home* – Jeremiah 31:7-14; Ephesians 1:3-14; John 1:-18

Prayer List

Rev Charliam Renner	Bishop Frank Beard	Our Conference	Our Healthcare Workers
Patti Corder and the Greenup Ambulance Crew		Angie Veach	Eric Veach
Cathy Devall	Brock McMorris	Ed & Verna Titus	Henry Catey
Jake Kiser	Cindy Cisney	Nancy Hoke	Don Wells
Tricia Adkins	Don Stewart	Ronnie Winstead	Annie McMorris
Dwight Parsons	Lauren Stewart	Phyllis Gable	Sage Martin
Dalton McFarland	Darrell Quick	Ruth Ann Finley	Sandy Starwalt
Jodie Bunch	Family of Mike Niebrugge	Gene Laymon	Tom Finley
Family of Martha Hurst	Family of Jeanette Carrell	Jim Nichols	Family of Larry Sappington
Richard Durham	Kathy Hanks	Wayne Carrell	Gary & Mary Winterrowd
Leo Smith	Family of Lowell Cutright	Bonnie Hite	Family of Lavada Markwell
Greg Williams	Eloise Buffenmeyer	Martha Roberts	Charlie & Charlotte Baxter
Paul Schulte			

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