

“Close to Home: Homesick”
Luke 21:25-36

One of the classic Christmas songs that we know is “White Christmas.” It has a lot of nostalgia and warm feelings about home. But the context of the song hits home for me in terms of the turmoil of our world today. It comes to us from the 1954 movie, “White Christmas” where we are taken to the Christmas Eve of 1944, and a division of American soldiers are celebrating in the middle of a battlefield during World War II.

Let’s watch the clip: (already added this to the media library on Proclaim as “White Christmas”)

Feeling homesick on a battlefield is one of the most common human experiences. Home becomes a symbol of safety, joy, peace, belonging, and comfort. In our Bible story for today, we have a battle-type scene. Jesus is speaking with the disciples in Jerusalem. Someone admired the beauty of the temple (image). That temple felt like the spiritual home for the Jewish people at the time. Even though they were living under occupation, the temple was one of the places where they could still feel at home. Instead of affirming that feeling, Jesus painted a grim picture of what was to come to that spiritual home. Everything was going to be destroyed. The temple’s time was limited. The Roman Empire was going to destroy this magnificent building. Not only that, but also the whole reality of life was going to be turned upside down for the followers of Jesus. They were going to face a lot of resistance and persecution. The world around them will seem like it is ending. Of course, the disciples wanted simple answers from Jesus. They wanted to know the exact time of these events, especially the end of the world. Jesus instead gave them the tools for getting through these times so that their sense of a spiritual home would not be dependent on a building or even the circumstances of life.

Let’s listen to Luke 21:25-36

²⁵ ‘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. ²⁶ People will faint from fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. ²⁷ Then they will see “the Son of Man coming in a cloud” with power and great glory. ²⁸ Now when these things begin to take place, stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.’

²⁹ Then he told them a parable: ‘Look at the fig tree and all the trees; ³⁰ as soon as they sprout leaves you can see for yourselves and know that summer is already near. ³¹ So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near. ³² Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all things have taken place. ³³ Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

³⁴ ‘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, ³⁵ like a trap. For it will come upon all who live on the face of the whole

earth. ³⁶ 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.'

³⁷ Every day he was teaching in the temple, and at night he would go out and spend the night on the Mount of Olives, as it was called. ³⁸ And all the people would get up early in the morning to listen to him in the temple.

Jesus' exhortation was to stay alert. The temple will be destroyed, and things may seem like the end of the world during war. What people once knew as home will no longer be there. Yet, in all of it, the work of faith is to stay grounded and awake! "Be on guard" "Be alert."

The struggles of our world may threaten to sweep us off our feet. The home we once knew may seem like a distant dream. But in faith, our hope for a new reality and a new home does not come from returning to what we once knew, but from staying grounded in God in the present moment.

Upheaval is all around us and it is tempting to think that if we just build a strong enough home or if we could just go back to a simpler time, we would be okay. But notice that Jesus does not recommend that his followers work to rebuild the temple after it is destroyed. Instead, he gives them the foundation that will keep them feeling at home in their lives no matter what. Home in that way is not something we can hold on to as much as it is an inward reality that flourishes through our connection to God and to others. It is an inward reality that flowers into outward experiences of peace, justice, and compassion.

No matter how hard we try to keep things the same around us, so that we may feel at home in this world, disruptions are always there and will always come in small and big ways. The invitation of this season of Advent is to stay close to our inner home with ourselves, God, and others. Instead of being drawn into the fears of our world, we are invited to dig deep into our home of peace in order to let something new to be born.

When the disciples were listening to Jesus' words about the destruction of the temple, I am sure they were devastated. Losing such an important part of their identity as Jews would have been catastrophic. They could not have imagined a new way of being the community of Jesus without him being in their midst and without the Temple in Jerusalem standing.

But being awake to the realities of God's love in and around them proved to be enough! They not only rebuilt their spiritual home, they also founded new communities for others to experience a spiritual home of love and transformation.

If you look all around you and are feeling the pain of the realities of our world, I pray that you will take the words of Jesus to heart. Stay awake to wonder! Look for love in the present moment. Be alert but not in the way of worry and fear. Instead, be alert to see where love is flourishing or can flourish.

One such great example is from the story of the Homeboy Industries. This is the largest rehab and re-entry program in the world, and it was started by someone who believed in the message of God's love. According to Hillside Community Church, "In 1988, Father Greg Boyle received his first assignment after seminary. He was assigned to be the parish priest of the [Dolores Mission Church](#) in the [Boyle Heights](#) neighborhood of Los Angeles. If L.A. was considered the gang capital of the world at the time, then Boyle Heights was the gang capital of the gang capital...Father Boyle quickly recognized that to really be a witness to God's love, he had to do more for the young men caught up in these gangs than just preside at their funerals. And after just a few months on the job he had already presided over scores of them.

So what he did was this: he hopped on his Huffy and biked from gang to gang trying to hammer out peace treaties between them. While he was ultimately unsuccessful, he earned a lot of street cred in the process and gang bangers started hanging out at his church at all hours of the day and night.

As Father Boyle got to know these young men, what he came to realize is that most of them didn't really want to be in a gang. Rather, they saw gangs as the only way to improve their economic situation. The problem was, however, that when they finally decided that they wanted out, they were so tattooed and had rap sheets so long that no sane business owner would hire them.

Out of love for these young men, Father Boyle started a tattoo removal service right there on church grounds. He then started talking to the managers of the factories in the neighborhood to see if they would be willing hire these young men. While they agreed philosophically to the premise, no job offers ever actually materialized. So Father Boyle took matters into his own hands once again: against all advice, he started a bakery staffed entirely by ex-gang members. Much to the chagrin of his naysayers, the enterprise was an instant success.

Word began to spread through the gang community and soon there were more requests for jobs than they had openings. In response, Father Boyle expanded and opened a silk-screening shop, then a janitorial business, and then a café, again staffed entirely by ex-gang members. Thus Homeboy Industries was born."

Here is a video about this amazing ministry: <https://youtu.be/42fsqGnwKYg>.

We are going to end with a prayer time where we look at the blueprint we received this morning as a metaphor for our interior home in God's grace. Write in it whatever each room might represent in your life. Work with this each week of Advent and allow God to help you prepare your interior home for the coming of Christ.

Remember: For where there is love, there is God. Amen.

