

Sermon – Homeward Bound  
Baccalaureate Sunday, June 6, 2021  
Scripture Readings: Mark 3:20-35, II Cor. 4:13-5:1  
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Our first scripture reading is Mark 3:20-35. Included in this passage is the verse that a house divided against itself cannot stand, quoted by Lincoln in his hometown of Springfield prior to the Civil War. Christ speaks this truth in response to the accusation from the religious community that Christ's power comes from Satan. The passage also alludes to division within Christ's family as they come to confront him. This provides another teaching moment for Christ who affirms the family ties among people of faith. These are the brothers and sisters with whom he is most at home. Hear now God's Holy word.

*20 Then Jesus went home; and the crowd came together again, so that they could not even eat. 21 When his family heard it, they went out to restrain him, for people were saying, "He has gone out of his mind." 22 And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem said, "He has Beelzebul, and by the ruler of the demons he casts out demons." 23 And Jesus called them to him, and spoke to them in parables, "How can Satan cast out Satan? 24 If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. 25 And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand. 26 And if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand, but his end has come. 27 But no one can enter a strong man's house and plunder his property without first tying up the strong man; then indeed the house can be plundered. 28 "Truly I tell you, people will be forgiven for their sins and whatever blasphemies they utter; 29 but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit can never have forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin"— 30 for they had said, "He has an unclean spirit." 31 Then his mother and his brothers came; and standing outside, they sent to him and called him. 32 A crowd was sitting around him; and they said to him, "Your mother and your brothers and sisters are outside, asking for you." 33 And Jesus replied, "Who are my mother and my brothers?" 34 And looking at those who sat around him, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! 35 Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother." Amen.*

Our second scripture reading is II Corinthians 4:13-5:1. The apostle Paul shares from his heart about the spirit of faith that causes us not to lose heart on our journeys, because of the home we have with God. Listen to what the Spirit is saying.

*13 But just as we have the same spirit of faith that is in accordance with scripture— "I believed, and so I spoke"—we also believe, and so we speak, 14 because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus, and will bring us with you into Christ's presence. 15 Yes, everything is for your sake, so that grace, as it extends to more and more people, may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God. 16 So we do not lose heart. Even though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day. 17 For this slight momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure, 18 because we look not at what can be seen but at what cannot be seen; for what can be seen is temporary, but what cannot be seen is eternal. 5 For we know that if the earthly tent in which we live is no longer, we have a home with God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. Amen.*

The title of the sermon – Homeward Bound

*Text: “For we know that if the earthly tent in which we live is no more, we have a home with God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. II Corinthians 5:1*

Let us pray. Holy and loving God, from whom we come, to whom we return, and in whom we live and move and have our being, thank you for the homes from which we come, the homes to which we return, and the home we have in you. And now, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of each of our hearts be acceptable in your sight. Amen.

*Wisdom builds a house, understanding establishes a home, knowledge furnishes the rooms with all that is precious and pleasing.* Peter and I received this Proverb, matted and in a frame, from his Dad and stepmom when we bought our first home in Clayton, Missouri twenty-nine years ago and it has hung in our kitchen as a gentle reminder throughout the years.

On this Baccalaureate Sunday, as we honor our high school graduates who are preparing to leave their homes, it is the hope and prayer of your parents and this faith community that the wisdom, the understanding, the knowledge, and as the Apostle Paul put it “the spirit of faith” you have received from your home (and this church family) will uplift you on this new journey.

Surely, there is a part of your home you will carry within you, and you will return to your home often through the years; however, each time you come home, you will be a little older and a little wiser from the experiences and the knowledge you have gained in between visits, and the kind of home you create for yourself wherever you are will reflect the home from which you come.

This week as Peter and I talked about today’s sermon on our way home through our old hometown from visiting our son in his new home, we discussed how the title “Homeward Bound” is a little counterintuitive for a sendoff sermon to our graduating seniors. However, as hit songwriters George Meyer, Paul Simon, and Marta Keen have reminded us through the years, there is poignant truth in how all of our journeys through life are “Homeward Bound.”

*For we know that if the earthly tent in which we live is no longer, we have a home with God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.*

I have the privilege of speaking these words of committal each time I accompany a family in bringing their loved one to his or her final resting place. There is something very tender about the confidence and joy in these words of hope affirming our belief in the resurrection which is at the heart of our faith.

We believe we have a home with God, the God who joined us in our humanity, the God whose journey home by way of a cross conquered death, and the God whose spirit makes a home in our hearts. It is because of this spirit of faith that we do not lose heart on our homeward bound journeys. It is faith that sustains us when we encounter momentary afflictions, unexpected contradictions, and surmounting challenges along the way.

Furthermore, it is faith and the conviction that all God’s children need a home which is why Westminster is partnering with Habitat for Humanity to build homes, is persevering with the Steadfast Neighbor Endeavor to repair homes, and is prioritizing Springfield’s Homeless as a part

of our next Strategic Plan. I am mindful that some of the most meaningful mission experiences for our graduating seniors has been working on homes through the Appalachia Service Project.

It is also true that the homes from which we come shape our character, form our values, and cultivate our faith. The homes from which we come and the people that nourish our faith teach us to believe in ourselves, to respect others, and to make a positive difference in the world through the work we choose.

None of the homes from which we come is without flaws or division. In my doctor of ministry studies in pastoral counseling, we explored family systems and learned that a healthy home allows for differences of opinion and disagreement, thus facilitating differentiation among family members who maintain a close emotional bond.

The words Jesus spoke in defense of himself after the accusation that his power to heal came from Satan reveal a truth that is self-evident. A house divided against itself cannot stand. Jesus' words also shed light on the danger of being so unified in our thoughts and viewpoints that we close ourselves off to others from whom we can learn and widen our understanding of God. It was the religious authorities who prove to be incapable of comprehending Jesus. Indeed, their certainty is a liability, for when Jesus does not fit their set religious expectations they declare that he is the enemy, theirs and God's! In their impenetrable unity of one point of view, they blaspheme the work of God's spirit.

As we gather to honor our graduates and send you on your journeys into the world, we pray that the foundation of your faith gives you the integrity of our Creator in the midst of challenge, opens your heart with the love of Christ in the midst of diversity, and uplifts you with the gentle strength of Holy Spirit as "the wind sends you racing" on your way homeward bound. Amen