

## SERMON

Pastor Cris Frigm

As we hear these words from Jesus this morning, it matters that we keep them connected to the chapters-long farewell discourse. This is just a small portion of the conversation Jesus had with the disciples at the Last Supper. In that setting, Jesus is offering words of hope and comfort to get the disciples ready for the events of Holy Week – the betrayal, the trial, the crucifixion.

At the beginning of this chapter, he offered the words so often heard at a funeral, “In my Father’s house there are many dwelling places.” He was trying to put words to the presence of God in the darkest of times, and that message continues in today’s reading. Thomas didn’t understand what Jesus was saying about the way he was going, and now Judas (not Iscariot) doesn’t know how they will recognize what God is doing. “Lord, how is it that you will reveal yourself to us?”

In his answer, Jesus returns to the same idea he conveyed to Thomas and the rest of the disciples earlier, God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – will “make our home with them.” God will establish a permanent, abiding relationship with those who remain in God’s Word.

It’s all closely interconnected...the Greek word for “dwelling places” used in the conversation with Thomas is the same word used for “home” here... “monen.” And it’s closely related to the word “meno” which means “to abide, to remain.” Think about that for a moment, remaining in God’s Word means remaining in relationship with God which becomes **home** for us.

I met Mark on Thursday morning. It wasn’t a planned meeting. I was getting ready to head into the office and get this sermon written. I stopped at McDonald’s for my morning iced tea. I was standing at the kiosk and Mark was standing near the counter. He saw me as I approached the touchscreen and did a mild double-take, followed by a “Good morning, father.” It happens often when I’m out in public in a clerical collar. Sometimes there’s the opportunity to clarify that I’m not a Catholic priest...and sometimes there isn’t.

I said good morning back and continued with my order. And then the follow-up came, “Do you know this area?” I could guess where this conversation was going based on Mark’s appearance and that particular question. He told me he was trying to get to Baltimore or DC and was wondering if there was any help for him. Because he was getting ready to start trying to hitchhike his way down 95.

I told Mark to come over to the church after his breakfast and we would try to figure something out. I got my tea and headed into the office to get my computer set up and Mark

shortly found his way over. Over the course of the next hour or so, while I worked to get Mark on the train to DC, I got to hear a little more of his story.

It wasn't entirely clear how desperate his life condition was, but he was making his way from Portland, Maine to Blacksburg, Virginia to work out a problem with a family member's home. Clearly there were not a lot of resources available, but he was doing what he had to do to get to his family. It struck me that while a 12-hour drive from Maine to Virginia doesn't sound like a good time to me, I can't imagine what it must feel like for someone with few to no resources. No car, very little money, dependent on the help of others to make a journey that some of us wouldn't blink at being able to accomplish.

Just to get home. Just to get to his family who needs him. Imagine for a moment what it might feel like to be so cut off and desperate to get **home**, to get to those who matter most. It's really hard to think about being that cut off from the relationships that matter – from any sense of home – because you just can't get there.

I don't think I changed Mark's life by getting him on a train instead of hitching a ride or walking for the next stage of his journey, but maybe I made his trek just a bit more manageable. Maybe being helped when he needed it will have a lasting impact on what happens next for him. I don't expect I'll know. He left a message on my voicemail letting me know he got on the train, and I don't expect that I'll ever hear from him again.

That's the way it goes sometimes...we have these brief encounters with people who are sometimes just looking for a little bit of help, but maybe they're also looking for a new way to think about home – a new way to define relationships that have the power to hold us together when everything else might be falling apart.

As I've heard your stories, I know that some of us have spent a lot of time in one place and others have moved fairly often. The home that Laurel and I bought in Newark is the 10<sup>th</sup> residence we've had in 30 years of marriage, and the six years we lived in Taneytown was the longest time Laurel has lived in one place...ever. When you change addresses that often, you start to learn that home isn't about a house or apartment. Home is about the relationships you develop – the connections that are made.

We felt that profoundly when we moved from our house in WV to seminary. We left a 2000 sq ft house on 2/3 acre of trees for a 700 sq ft apartment with 2 adults, 5- and 7-year-old kids, a dog, and 2 cats. And we were so much happier in that place, with the new connections we made with friends and one another. Is it too cliché to say, "home is where the heart is?" Maybe, but it's true. And maybe home is where God is too.

“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you,” Jesus says, and it isn’t the peace the world offers by trying to eliminate conflict and keep everyone comfortable. It’s the peace of abiding relationships that are built on the loving reality of a God who makes a home with us. That home might be a traditional house with bricks and drywall. It might be a relationship formed in a McDonald’s. The home that God calls us to – the home that God gathers us in is built on the promises of Jesus, the love that God, and the peace of the Holy Spirit. Always. Amen.