

Easter Sunday 4/5/15
Isaiah 55:6–13
We Are Going Home

SERMON TEXT THIS EASTER MORNING ARE THE WORDS OF OUR OLD TESTAMENT READING, FROM THE 55TH CHAPTER OF ISAIAH

The young lady from Kansas said it best, “There’s no place like home.” Home! The very word evokes feelings of love and laughter, security and serenity, warmth and welcome. It means mom and dad, fun and games, good food, deep sleep in your own bed. Easter means we are going home!

Let’s unpack this promise.

Isaiah, writing in the eighth century BC, addresses Israelites living in captivity in Babylon in the sixth century BC. These exiles are far away from home. That fire-breathing monster called Babylon had devastated their Temple, their religion, their lives and their livelihood. In 587 BC, Babylon decided once and for all to destroy Jerusalem, described in the Babylonian archives as “a rebellious city, hurtful to kings and provinces, and a place of rebellion from ancient times” (Ezra 4:15), and take her citizens away as captives.

Now in refugee camps, the Israelites are stuck in a land with canals and ziggurats and the Tigris and Euphrates rivers and the Ishtar Gate and the detestable statue of the Babylon god Marduk. Judah and Jerusalem and the Jordan have been replaced by the building projects of Nabopolassar and his son Nebuchadnezzar. These Judean exiles have no king, no temple, no royal city, no land, no sacrifice, no hope, and no future. Oh, “There’s no place like home!”

The exiles are far away from home but, more pressing, they are far away from the Father. Just like the prodigal son, Israelites demanded their

fair share of the inheritance, set off for a distant country, and squandered it all on wild living. The list is long and ugly: enticing Baal worship, seductive Assyrian astral deities, perverting justice and righteousness, worthless worship, false faith. On August 19, 587 BC Jerusalem was destroyed. To use the words of the songwriter, it was the day the music died!

Some of us are far away from home on Easter Sunday but, more pressing, all of us are far away from the Father. It's the way we are, by nature sinful and unclean. We are stuck in an exile of our making. We demand our fair share of the inheritance and set off for distant, seductive, deadly lights. We sell our baptismal promises -- for what? Deceitful lives, empty relationships, and inflated egos. Then Satan plants his foot on our necks and shouts, "God is finished with you!"

But God speaks to exiles! Isaiah 55:12,

"For you shall go out in joy and be led forth in peace; the mountains and the hills before you shall break forth into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands."

Just when the music had died and Israel's history seemed closed and controlled by hopeless Babylonian imperial policy, to the shock and surprise of everyone the Lord stirs up His deliverer Cyrus who defeats Babylon and then releases -- [*releases!*] -- the exiles. A Servant is wounded for our transgressions and crushed for our iniquities. The punishment that brought us peace was upon Him and by His wounds. By His wounds, we are healed. The climax of Isaiah's program in chapters 40–55 is God's promise to bring the exiles home.

Standing behind this promise is God's almighty Word. Earlier Isaiah wrote, "The word of our God stands forever" (40:8). Now the Lord

promises that this same Word will never return empty. God said it. That settles it. Faith believes it!

In Bethlehem, this powerful Word took on flesh and blood, and He has a heart. Jesus sympathizes with us in our weaknesses, which means He knows the bitter pain of exile. He was far away from home -- “Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay His head” (Luke 9:58). But more pressing, He was far away from the Father. Jesus was betrayed, spit upon, and scourged. Nailed and dying upon the cross, He was abandoned, forsaken, by God the Father. It was the day the music died.

Yet, bodily raised on the third day, the song – no, check that -- the grand symphony of celebration, sounds forth to all creation. Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! And, the Easter resurrection means that all believers in Christ will rise to eternal life.

I suppose I will reveal my age, but I am old remember well the cartoon boll weevil. Every episode ended with that boll weevil strolling down the road into the setting sun, his satchel over his shoulder, and singing, “Gotta find me a home.”

As exiles, strangers, here, we just want a place of love and laughter, security and serenity, warmth and welcome; a place that means mom and dad, fun and games, good food, deep sleep with no nightmarish trains at midnight waking us up. We just want a home!

You know; Oh, you know.

Some of you have felt so lonely ever since your husband died, your child was buried, you lost your job, or your doctor pointed out that lump in your breast or that spot on your lung. Others of you wanted a home ever

since your home collapsed when it was hit by divorce, debt, or debilitating disease.

Easter means we are going home! “Because I live,” Jesus says, “you also will live” (Jn 14:19). Because Jesus rose, we, too, shall rise, in body and soul, on the last day. And He will take us home, to the New Jerusalem, where there will be no pain, no tears, no cancer, no sickness, no loneliness, no sadness, no mass murders, no hatred, no injustice, no fears, no tears, no death, no end!

Jesus promises,

“I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with Me that you also may be where I am” (Jn 14).

This is no dorm room or army barracks or hospital room. This is no palace with crystal chandeliers and gold bathtub. It is infinitely better!

Your Father in heaven has something far better than a robe and sandals and ring to give you. He has the crown of life. The price is paid, the party prepared, the sacrifice complete, and the Father has rehearsed His lines, “This son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost but now he is found” (Luke 15:24).

“For you shall go out in joy and be led forth in peace; the mountains and the hills before you shall break forth into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands” (Isaiah 55:12).

And our response? We “join in the hymn of all creation . . . For the Lamb who was slain has begun His reign” (LSB, p. 155). We sing an endless and deathless Alleluia. Why? We are going home! Alleluia.

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Amen.