

Emmaus Road Mennonite Fellowship
August 1, 2010
Anita Rediger

Homemaking God

Listen again... the Lord said, “and I shall settle them in their homes.” What beautiful words to end the reading of the OT scripture. These words complement poignantly the responsive reading of our Call To Worship from Psalm 107...listen again...

“O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures forever. Let the redeemed of the Lord say so, those he redeemed from trouble and gathered in from the lands, from the east and from the west, from the north and from the south...”

“Gathered in...from all directions and settled in homes,” “Gathered in...settled in,” let’s sit with these images a bit, savoring the hope and joy found in these words of promise. We – like the peoples of the world have always been- are a wandering, sojourning people...what could it mean to be “gathered in” by God?

This is a season for traveling and reunions. Marie has just returned this from a trip “home” to Saskatchewan – to the Tiefengrund Mennonite Church as a 100 year anniversary was celebrated. We’d call this occasion a “homecoming.” The Schmidt men made their way to Kansas earlier this summer to Greg’s childhood home; Melissa and the Frey women, too! Dorothy, last fall, flew “home to California.” Pam and Andy traveled to the east coast for a family reunion 6 weeks or so ago – to be near to Andy’s childhood home of Connecticut. Today, on this special Swiss Days weekend, we celebrate reunions of family and friends in Berne, Indiana.

In each of these places and on each of these occasions, I can just imagine folks greeting one another with the expression, “Welcome home!” No matter where we’ve come from, there is something deeply moving about that simple expression.

I, too, have recently had the opportunity to “go home.” How good it was to be present at a family wedding, to see the great, expansive sky of western Nebraska; to see the familiar landmarks of “the cottonwood grove,” “the Enders grain elevator...” and to smell the earthy smell of sagebrush on the evening air. Ironically, however, I realized that as I spoke to folks of my return plans, I heard myself saying, “We’ll be leaving for “home” on Thursday. I’d just come home to Enders, Nebraska, how could it be that I was talking about going home to Indiana? Home...could it be in more than one place? What are we really talking about when we say, “I’m home!”

With today’s scriptures “simmering” as I traveled, I was prompted today to invite you to muse with me about this very common, yet poignant word – “home.” What stirs within

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you when I invite you to think of home? What images of place come to mind (I wonder what each of you are “seeing” right now!) What do you feel? What memories come effortlessly to mind when you think of “home?”

This week, I did a bit of a survey with a couple of our Swiss Village study groups. I asked this same question. *Home – what is it?* From our usually rather reticent group, answers came quickly. Home – it’s “a place of peace, a place of safety,” the place of childhood, a place where there is family,” “a place where I feel satisfied, it’s where I can rest.” I was moved to hear the words of these very old people. Looking around the circle I was aware heads around the circle were nodding in agreement... I sensed that the topic of “home” evoked deeply-felt, tender feelings. And, this is certainly an ancient biblical motif! From their earliest days, God’s people longed for home...when in captivity in Egypt, when carried off into captivity in Babylon...the NT gives us the transforming story of the homecoming of the wayward son...

In the presence of those who are in late life comes the awareness that our “earthly homes” are ever changing. This awareness brings questions right along with it. Are we doomed to be homeless if we are no longer able to live at the address we once called home? Are we hopelessly homeless if we no longer have family members living near to us? – or even living at all? And what about our own private sense of “homelessness” that may be the reality of what simply appears to be home? In light of these realities...how can God offer “home” to his children? *What **does** it mean to be “settled into our homes by God?”*

What might the prophet Hosea be thinking as he speaks to this wandering people? Hosea sketches God’s relationship with Israel – from childhood – through the years of captivity in Egypt - to the final days before captivity in Assyria. The prophetic words point out that the covenant relationship with Israel and God has been broken. God’s beloved people are creating alliances with Syria and Egypt and turning their worship toward idolatrous objects.

As persons on the journey of faith, what does it mean for us to “be welcomed home?” This text invites us to ask ourselves, what “alliances” are we creating that are other than our covenant relationship with God? Instead of being “settled into our homes by God” do we also refuse the spacious living space God invites us to? What “rules” our lives...what can we learn about our relationship with God if (vs 6) “the sword rages through the cities...because of our plots?”

The Hosea text – is a text filled with descriptions of a tender, long-suffering, prodigal-loving... home-making God. These poetic verses beckoned the ancient people of Israel, calling as well as to us today... “beloved children, know that in my presence you are

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welcome, know that wherever my Love is received and shared you are at home!" When we are "gathered in" by God, every place can be home...

As Mom and I traveled "home" last weekend, we stopped at Exit 220 on I-80 in Iowa. Perhaps, it is familiar to some of you – the location of the "World's Largest Truckstop!"

- Describe the gathering of travelers...awareness of outward tension and dis-ease...found myself aware of the inner sense of God's presence with us – even in that most "not-at-home" places...
- Margie & Terry's hellish search for their son just this last Thursday...heard in their anguish the cries of the God of Hosea.

"God's intentions are redemption, restoration, and return." When we wander away and become disoriented by the challenges of life we are not deserted or left to our own devices. Instead, God's voice calls to us "like a lion." The image at first sounds fierce; lions devour! But no! this is the voice of a lion which "roars" so that we can find our way home again. (One of our grandson's animal books says that the roar of the lion can be heard for five miles!) God's "voice" roars so that no matter where we are or where've been – we can hear the invitation home. For those of us who call this community "home;" for each one who today is a traveler and guest; whenever any of us finds ourselves as the alien and stranger...may each one know that – no matter where we are...no matter how "foreign" everything around us may be...that nothing can separate us from the love of God which comes to us as God's children. "Beloved, God's chosen" God, longs to "gather us in, to settle us in." We are at home in the heart of God....

AMEN

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Hosea 11:1

When Israel was a child I loved him, and I called my son out of Egypt.
but the more I called, the further they went away from me;
they offered sacrifice to Baal and burnt incense to idols.
I myself taught Ephraim to walk,
I myself took them by the arm, but they did not know that I was the one caring for them,
that I was leading them with human ties, with leading-strings of love,
that, with the, I was like someone lifting an infant to his cheek,
and that I bent down to feed him.

He will not have to go back to Egypt, Assyria will be his king instead!
since he has refused to come back to me,
the sword will rage through his cities, destroying the bars of his gates,
devouring them because of their plots.

My people are bent on disregarding me: if they are summoned to come up, not one of
them makes a move.
Ephraim, how could I part with you?
Israel, how could I give you up?
How could I make you like Admah or treat you like Zeboim?
My heart within me is overwhelmed,
fever grips my inmost being.
I will not give rein to my fierce anger,
I will not destroy Ephraim again,

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for I am God, not man, the Holy One in your midst, and I shall not come to you in anger.

They will follow the Lord;
he will roar like a lion,
and when he roars,
his children will come fluttering from the west,
fluttering like sparrows from Egypt,
like pigeons from Assyria,
And I shall settle them in their homes.