

“Stuck at Home”  
Matthew 7:24-27 & Psalm 23  
4<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Lent

March 22, 2020  
Westminster, Greenville  
Ben Dorr

\*\*\*\*\*

After last week’s livestream worship,  
I went home and asked my wife how it went.

She told me that everyone in the family liked it.

In fact, she reported that our youngest son REALLY like it.  
He said: “Mom, are there churches that worship on the Internet every  
week?”

In other words, why can’t we stay in our pajamas?  
Why can’t we stretch out on the comfort of the couch?  
Why can’t we always worship **at home**?

I’d like to invite you to spend some time this morning thinking about that  
one word: HOME.

Home—what do we mean by home, what is it like to be home—it’s been on  
my mind a lot this past week.

Maybe some of you have spent your days this week with new routines, and a  
lot of TOGETHER TIME in your house. Or maybe others of you have simply  
been by yourself, and you really miss being OUT with other people away from  
your home.

Home can be a comfortable place.  
But it can also be a LONELY place.

For many, this past week has meant schoolwork at home, working from  
home. Meanwhile I look out right now, at our Westminster sanctuary—and all the  
pews are completely empty...

It LOOKS like our church home.  
Without you, it does not FEEL like our church home.

What does home mean for you?

I ask not only because so many of us are spending more time at home than we're used to.

I ask because the Bible has something to teach us about that word...something important for this PARTICULAR time, in the midst of a GLOBAL pandemic.

Take our Scripture passage for today.

Psalm 23—

one of the most familiar passages in all the Bible.

Do you remember how it ends?

“I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.”

It's an image of SECURITY, a beautiful picture of trust in God.

To be in GOD'S HOUSE, according to the Psalmist...is to be home.

And yet...I think if we look at the many ways that scripture talks about HOME...we might be STARTLED at the relationship between FAITH IN GOD and being home.

For example...

Take Abraham.

When he is still called Abram. What is Abram told by God to do?

He's told to leave his country and his kindred and his father's house...he's told that the faithful thing is to...**leave home.**

Or how about after the Israelites are freed from slavery?

Does God take them and after a week of traveling, they arrive at the Promised Land, their brand new home?

No, no...the WILDERNESS becomes their home.  
 Not for a week, not for 40 weeks, but for 40 years.  
 For 40 years, being faithful to God meant **never really having a home.**

Or do you remember the exile in the Old Testament?

When Jerusalem is destroyed by the Babylonians, and the Israelites—they get taken to a foreign land. God comes to them through the prophet Jeremiah, and God says they'll make it back to the Promised Land...but only after living in Babylon for 70 years!

That's 4 generations **living in a home that they never dreamed would be home!**

Do you see the pattern here?  
 Home in the Bible does not always mean comfort and security.

It means trusting in God's presence, in God's grace and God's love...during times of INSECURITY.

During times...like what we're in right now.

It's been said in various ways recently that not since WWII has there been this kind of INSECURITY throughout the world.

So let me ask you something...  
 At this moment, what is it that is giving you a sense of stability?  
 What helps you feel at home?

\*\*\*\*\*

I heard an interview that Tom Hanks gave a few months ago.

Did you know that Tom Hanks, at one time, owned hundreds of typewriters? He's been giving them away recently, so that he's down to something like 120 now, but...it begs the question, why typewriters?

Apparently, when Hanks was a very young boy, 5 years old, his parents got a divorce, and Tom lived with two of his siblings and his dad. His father's life wasn't stable, and he remarried, and remarried, and so Tom Hanks had to move around a lot as a kid, which meant he never had a very permanent home.

One of the consequences of all this was that when he was a boy, he lost a lot of toys. Cherished toys. Because he wasn't in charge of packing the boxes whenever he had to move. And some of his toys would always fail to make it to the new place that his dad took him to...

So as a young adult, someone gave him a typewriter as a gift.  
And he started buying typewriters.  
And as his career blossomed, he bought more and more.  
Those typewriters became a symbol of something for Tom Hanks.

A symbol that he was—finally—in control of his toys?  
Even more than that...  
A symbol of security, of stability.  
A symbol, if you will, of the home he never had.<sup>1</sup>

\*\*\*\*\*

Have you been thinking about that word...HOME?

May I suggest that whatever it is that gives you a sense of peace right now, whoever it is that restoreth your soul...that person is God's gift to you?

That person or practice is God's way—of reaching out to you.

God comes to us in the wilderness,  
or in exile,  
or as Psalm 23 says—  
even in “the valley of the shadow of death”—  
God is there.

And wherever God is, we can be at home.

---

<sup>1</sup> As told on “The Daily,” a podcast of The New York Times, found at <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/15/podcasts/the-daily/tom-hanks-coronavirus.html>.

Of course, the point is not just that WE can feel at home with God, even in the midst of social distancing. The point is that we, as followers of Christ, are called to GIVE that sense of home, that sense of peace, to friends and family, neighbors and strangers, in these uncertain times.

My brother-in-law called me this week from California. My mother had recently traveled to California, was now back in Michigan, and she and my father are, at the moment—not just social distancing, but self-quarantining, to make sure that neither of them are sick or get sick.

So my brother-in-law was wondering who would be nearby who could pick up food for my parents. I called my mother, who told me that their next-door neighbors—parents about my age, maybe a little younger than me—they were already on it. They had already offered to shop for groceries for my parents so that they wouldn't have to go to the store.

Do you know what kind of peace that gave me?

Henri Nouwen once wrote:

“We are not called to...solve all problems...  
but each of us has our own unique call,  
in our families, in our work, in our world.

“We have to keep asking God to help us see clearly what our call is and to give us the strength to live out that call with trust. Then we will discover that our faithfulness to a small task is the most healing response to the illnesses of our time.”<sup>2</sup>

Our faithfulness to a small task...

I said a moment ago that looking out at these empty pews doesn't really feel like our church home. Let me retract that statement.

---

<sup>2</sup> Henri Nouwen, *Bread for the Journey: A Daybook of Wisdom and Faith*, New York: HarperCollins, 1997.



“She works here too, so I get to see a lot of her. I’m glad she’s home...but NOT so glad. I mean, I have to sleep on the couch.”

The SECOND time he was there, the SAME teenager was working. The conversation picked up where they had left off before.

“Still relegated to the couch?”

“Yep,” she said.

“You know my sister...well, she’s home because she’s getting a divorce. Her husband was abusive—I feel bad about that, because I liked him, but he wasn’t nice to her. It’s the right thing to do.”

At this point my colleague was searching for something to say. Clearly, this teenage waitress had some things on her mind.

But as my colleague put it:

“Here, now, in front of this waitress—

two half-conversations over two meals in two days—

I couldn’t think of a thing to say.

So I just nodded, and tried to look sympathetic.”

The THIRD time he was there, he saw this teenager talking to a slightly older version of herself.

Soon, the older sister came to take the order.

She wrote it all down on the pad, and then said:

“Thank you for what you said to my sister earlier.

She told me it was you. Thank you.”

“But I didn’t say ANYTHING!” my colleague replied.

“At least, I don’t...I don’t really remember what I said.

What did she say I said?”

“It doesn’t matter,” the older sister said.

“It helped. Whatever you said helped.”

And then she said this:

***“We believe in God. With God’s help, we’ll get through this.”***

\*\*\*\*\*

Now...I never met that waitress.

But her words have stayed with me through all these years.

Her faith in God was strong.

Her trust in God was seeing her through.

May I use her words with you?

**We believe in God.**

**With God’s help, we’ll get through this.**

Amen.