

“The Homeless”

Our Threshold Moment stated: “There are homeless people all around us, some are without a physical home and others without a spiritual home. This passage reminds us that even Jesus was homeless. Even Jesus was cast out and turned away.” **“Whether we are welcoming those without a physical home or confronting our own need to find a spiritual home in Christ, this week we claim the reality of a new home as followers of Jesus. To claim our home in the Kingdom requires us to let go of our former home and look toward our home with God.”**

Before we examine closely our Scripture Reading, let’s consider a comment from Karoline Lewis. She began her message on our text, “When I started thinking about the column for this week, my first response was, **‘Sorry, Jesus. You are wrong.’** Sometimes we have to bury our dead and you are just going to have to wait. Sometimes we have to say goodbye to those we are leaving or to those we have lost, and we will catch up to you eventually. Sometimes we have a few things that need tending before we jump on the discipleship bandwagon. Like what, you might say, Jesus? Well, like grief, for example, for those close and personal, but also for whom our world continues to insist cannot be a part of your kingdom. Sometimes we just need some time. Thanks, Jesus.” (“Every Moment Counts” by Karoline Lewis posted on <workingpreacher.org>) Although she started her message that way, Lewis immediately went on to sympathetically examine Jesus’ position during those encounters with the different possible disciples.

Luke’s presentation of the situation does seem to paint Jesus in an unfavorable way. However, it is important to note one of the persons, who might have become a disciple of Jesus, was there to tell him he wanted to follow him and then wanted to delay implementing his discipleship, so he could tell his family goodbye. That’s a bit strange isn’t it. **Why would you go out to meet Jesus to volunteer without having already said your goodbyes?** Ok, that situation is not one, which puts Jesus in a bad light.

But, what about the man, who Jesus asked to follow him? **He did not come volunteering to be a disciple and only wanted to go back to bury his father before accepting Jesus’ invitation.** Wasn’t it cruel of Jesus to demand the grieving son follow him immediately, without burying his father? Perhaps, it would be helpful for us to look at this encounter in a fashion similar to the situation of the man, who volunteered to follow Jesus but wanted to go say goodbye to his family. **The man’s father needed to be buried, yet, he had come to see Jesus as he was passing by on his way to Jerusalem. Why did he do that?** Was he merely curious about Jesus or did he want to see a performance or did he have a degree of understanding of Jesus’ purpose and came because he was spiritually drawn to him? If the grieving son was merely curious or was there for a show, then he would not be interested in what Jesus was offering – the New Life – being at home in God’s Kingdom. In such a circumstance, the man was doomed to follow the way of death, which is encouraged by society and selfishness. **It would be the “dead burying the dead”.**

If the grieving son came because he was spiritually drawn to Jesus – was being led by God, then Jesus provided him a glimpse at the importance of the New Life – of being at home in God’s Kingdom, along with the urgency of the moment. **Jesus, himself, could not wait for the grieving son to return following the burying of his father for he was quickly heading to Jerusalem to die – to fulfill his calling from God!**

Anne Howard wrote, “Luke shows Jesus on a long hot trek toward Jerusalem (Luke 9:51-62), a road that winds through the enemy territory of the Samaritans. He tells his followers to leave their plows, their nets, their families, and they do.” Howard asked, “Why do they take to the road – leave plows and nets and flocks and families?” **“What do they want?”**

Howard answered her questions, “They want the one thing I believe we all want. We have had lots of words for it in the church, lots of metaphors that hint at it, approximate it, but that never quite get it right. We have called it heaven, and the kingdom, and paradise. We have named it salvation. We have built doctrines and creeds around it. We have assumed that this precious thing is far-off and unattainable, something for a later day, another life.” **“We have had lots of words for this, but the best word I know to name this precious thing is, simply, home.”**

Howard concluded, “I’m sure there are many who would disagree with me, but I’m convinced that this is really the only good reason we make church: it’s because we want a home. We want that dwelling place, a safe place to engage the questions of our day and the daily decisions of our lives. We want a place of refreshment but not retreat, a place that calls us to be all that God created us to be, even as we learn that God loves us just the way we are right now.” **“We want a home, where we can be free to be who we are. We want a place where all are welcome. We want to be home free.”** (Anne Howard: A Word in Time: Home Free (Luke 9) posted by <day1.org>)

Focusing on being “home free”, let’s take a closer look at **verses 57b-58, “a man said to Jesus, ‘I will follow you wherever you go.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Foxes have holes, and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lie down and rest.’”** What did Jesus describe with his response? Jesus told the would-be follower that he, Jesus, was homeless! Have you ever thought of Jesus being homeless? Certainly, as Jesus was heading to Jerusalem for his final mortal act of obedience, he was not living in his own home – he was homeless during his journey. **He depended on the hospitality of strangers.** Yes, it was a requirement of Jewish traditions and practices for people to provide such hospitality but I suspect, most found convenient ways to avoid providing much hospitality to strangers. Remember, Jesus knew the people, who followed the evil and corrupt ways of this world, were going to play a major role in his fulfillment of his purpose – his dying to demonstrate and prove **God’s Agape Love, Forgiveness, Invitation, and Welcome for All People.**

Let’s also remember, Jesus sought to help, comfort, and empower the outcasts of Society. Among those were the homeless. **The sculpture of “The Homeless Jesus”** reminds us of his close connection with the vulnerable, especially, the homeless, rejected, and oppressed. It seems some in our government in their treatment of immigrants seeking asylum, especially children, are unaware that **Jesus taught in his Parable of the Final Judgment in Matthew 25:45, “The King will reply, ‘I tell you, whenever you refused to help one of these least important ones, you refused to help me.’”**

Perhaps, because of our location, on behalf of the congregation, I see many homeless folks or persons, who are in danger of being homeless. We have helped many of them by buying them meals or groceries or gasoline or inexpensive bicycles or a night’s stay in a room or other needed supplies. We also contribute over \$3,000 a year to help those in need in the community through Christian Community Action. **A significant way we help the Hungry, of which the Homeless are part, is our support of the CROP Hunger Walk. This year’s Walk will begin at 8 a.m. on Saturday, October 12th.** That is a holiday and I am aware a number of our previous CROP Walkers will be unavailable, so that means, we need even more focus on most of us making financial contributions in support of our CROP Walkers, in order that we reach or exceed what we have donated for previous CROP Hunger Walks. **On the bottom left hand corner of the Welcome Sheet is an article about the CROP Walk.** At the conclusion of it is a web site you can go to sign up to be a CROP Walker and/or to make your contribution. If you do not have the ability to go on line, please let me know and we will assist you in doing so or you can make a check out to Round Grove United Church with CROP written on the “for line” and we will make the donation for you online.

Round Grove United Church, United Church of Christ, is a **“God Is Still Speaking”** church and part of our welcome of all people is welcoming the homeless. **It is crucial that we continue to demonstrate hospitality to everyone, including those, who are Homeless.**

It is important for us to recognize there are also many people, who are **“Homeless” in their relationship with God and the Body of Christ – the Church.** A good number are unaware of their homelessness because they are so caught up in trusting the selfish and self-centered life encouraged by Society. However, there are times in everyone’s life when the false promises of happiness from chasing after money, things, pleasure, violence, and power are exposed. It is often in such times that depression, despair, and meaninglessness lead persons, who are homeless in their relationships with God and the Body of Christ, to either seek or are open to our Divine Parent’s Agape Love, Forgiveness, Invitation, and Welcome. When we become aware of such a “Homeless” person, **Jesus and God call us to follow their Example – to be their hands, mouths, and agents of agape love.** There is one more surprising piece of Truth – there are many persons, who, although we are unaware of their spiritual homelessness, who would greatly welcome and benefit from our agape lovingly sharing God’s Invitation and Welcome. I am not suggesting we become aggressive and judgmental evangelists. **But, we are called and provided the opportunity to let family, friends, neighbors, coworkers, and other persons we meet know about God’s Invitation and Welcome.** So, I encourage you to receive today one or more of the keys being passed out at this time to give to someone, of whom you are unaware of having a church “home”. **As you give out your key or keys with the phrase on it of “Our home is with God”, invite them to join you in one of our Worship Celebrations and/or other activities.** If they don’t tell you they have a spiritual “Home” and they say they don’t feel comfortable accepting your invitation, let them know they will always be welcome and you hope they will find their spiritual “Home” in the future.

Rejoice, for through God’s Agape Love shown in Jesus Christ, we have a True Home in God’s Kingdom and in the Body of Christ, the Church! Let us always be agape loving, supportive, and seeking justice for those, who are “The Homeless” because they have no place to lay their heads. Let us, also, be **God’s Agents of Agape Love, Forgiveness, Invitation, and Welcome to All People,** especially the outsiders and those, who have no spiritual “Home”. Amen.