

There's No Place Like Home

by Rev. Robert Griffith

There were two statements in our Bible readings today which gripped my heart and stood out for me. Perhaps that is because we don't think often enough about our true destination, our God-ordained home and the whole reason the Church exists. Or perhaps it is because I am tired and I have had two of the most challenged years of my forty plus years in ministry. Or maybe it's a bit of both. The first statement is found in Psalm 27:4

"One thing I ask from the Lord, this only do I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze on the beauty of the Lord and to seek Him in His temple."

The second statement which goes with that one is from Philippians 3:20-21

"But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Saviour from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, Who, by the power that enables Him to bring everything under His control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like His glorious body."

I think one of the most memorable lines from any movie of any time would have to be the words spoken by Dorothy in the Wizard of Oz as she clicked her shiny red shoes together and said, *"There's no place like home."* I think a lot of us here will agree with that statement that there is definitely no place like the place we call home. Whether we are children, teenagers, young adults or in our twilight years, there is still no place like home.

I think for many of us, home is a place of familiarity, and familiarity brings warmth and comfort. Home is where we have so many fond memories. Home is also a place of security for many of us, where we can go and feel safe. At the end of the day we come home and we feel okay to let our guard down and just be ourselves.

As I was watching the news a few weeks ago and saw more people's homes being destroyed in devastating bushfires, it was such a powerful reminder for me that our homes here on earth are ultimately perishable. Home is that place where we are supposed to feel secure and safe, and yet for so many people caught up in floods, fires and cyclones, they realise in an instant that their earthly homes are frail and fragile.

So today, I want to talk to you about a different home, a home that the Bible tells us will never be destroyed and this is the home for which all of us should be homesick. That place is called heaven. Let me read you something to you written by an old lady named Missy Buchanan. It is called, *'Homesick at ninety two.'*

Being homesick makes sense for a seven year old child leaving for camp. But I am very old. Why am I so restless for home? I believe it's because you made me that way, God. You created me with an earthly body but a heavenly spirit that yearns to be with You. This world is not my home. Not really. I can recall every nook and cranny of the old home place. It's where I raised my family and stood at the kitchen sink. Those vivid memories bring comfort and joy. But as wonderful as it was, heaven is so much better. You promise it will be beyond my imagination, a place where pain and worry do not exist.

The author here is homesick but she's talking about a different type of homesickness. She's not homesick for her earthly home, but rather she is homesick for heaven. She mentions that she feels so restless for home and the reason why is because God created her that way, with a spirit that yearns to be with her Creator, her Redeemer, Her Saviour, her heavenly Father.

Even though most of the time we may not be aware of it, I think deep down inside each true disciple of Jesus Christ there is this same homesickness for heaven. It's as though we have a homing instinct guiding us there. It's amazing how God has built a homing instinct into animals. Against all odds, salmon come home from the sea to lay their eggs in the rivers of their birth. Birds migrate home over long distances every year as well. There is something built into those animals that brings them home. Likewise, God has built that into each one of us: an instinct, a desire, a homesickness for heaven.

Ecclesiastes 3:11 says, "*(God) has planted eternity in the human heart.*"

Each one of us was created to go to heaven. C.S. Lewis, the famous Christian writer once said:

Creatures are not born with desires unless satisfaction for those desires exists. A baby feels hunger: well, there is such a thing as food. A duckling wants to swim: well there is such a thing as water...If I find in myself a desire which no experience in the world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world.

Let me give you this illustration. Just imagine you take a fish out of the ocean and place him on the beach. Watch his gills gasp and his scales dry out. Is he happy? No! How do you make him happy? Do you cover him with a mountain of cash? Do you make him a nice sand castle to live in? Of course not! Then how do you make him happy? You put him back where he belongs. You put him back in the water. He will never be happy on the beach - because he was not created for the beach.

Likewise, each one of us will never be completely happy in the kingdom of this world. That's why the Bible says we are 'aliens' and 'strangers.' We are pilgrims on a journey to somewhere else. We were created for another Kingdom, the Kingdom of God – the Kingdom of heaven. Now because of that, we will never be fully satisfied with our lives here on earth. But the irony is that most of us spend so much of our time trying to find satisfaction on this earth. We think if we are able to achieve the perfect home here on earth which may entail a nice big house, a loving spouse, obedient children, a nice stable job, two cars, lots of grandchildren - basically the Australian dream ... then we will be happy and content. Deep down, we know that's an illusion. Actually, it is a lie.

Last week as I stood in this very place with a coffin in front of me and a building filled to capacity with mourners at a funeral, I was confronted again with a brutal reality which I then reflected back to everyone who gathered here to farewell a loved one: WE ALL DIE ... and when we face that time personally or endure the loss of someone close to us, we are forced to concede that this life on earth is just a tiny drop in the ocean of eternity and everything we have enjoyed, endured and experienced down here will one day come to an end and none of us know when that end will be.

As I looked across all those mourners I could see that there was a reckoning happening deep within many hearts. Most of those people were very comfortable, some even quite wealthy. Most of them had everything this world can offer and had achieved a great deal in their lives. But at that moment as they sat and stared at a wooden box which contained the earthly remains of someone they just lost, none of that seemed to be worth anything. They had lost something which money, success, fame, power and hard work could never buy: they lost a husband, a father, a grandfather, a brother, a mentor, a friend. In that moment, eternity was as close as it will ever be for any living person and those people were all challenged to ask, "*Where is my true home?*" What is my deepest longing?

I think St. Augustine sums up very well what I am trying to say here. He said, *"You have made us for Yourself and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in You."* We will always be restless if we try to find rest here on this earth and through things of this earth. We need to come to the point where we realize this world is not our true home, and that true rest can only come when we finally return to our eternal home in heaven. The Bible tells us that heaven is real place. We have Jesus' word on that. He told His disciples not to worry about death, and then gave them a reason:

John 14:2 - *"In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going to prepare a place for you."*

Heaven is a real place for real people as much as our earthly houses are real places now. But what is it like? I think often we don't desire heaven or long to be there because our expectations of heaven are so low. We see it simply as a place where we go after we die, or where we'll meet all our friends and family again, or where we'll be holding harps and singing all day long. No, heaven is far, far more than that. The Apostle Paul said it us beyond anything we could ever dream:

1 Corinthians 2:9 – *"No one has ever imagined what God has prepared for those who love Him."*

What a breathtaking verse! Do you see what it says? Heaven is beyond our imagination. We cannot envision it. Try this. Whatever heaven means to you, imagine it. Get it firmly fixed in your mind. Delight in it. Dream about it. Long for it. And then smile as your heavenly Father reminds you, *No one has ever imagined what I have prepared for you.* Whatever you dream of about heaven in your wildest imagination – won't even come close to the reality!

Think of all the songs about heaven. All the artists' portrayals. All the sermons preached, poems written, and chapters drafted. When it comes to describing heaven, we have all failed. It is way beyond us. But I think the Bible does give us glimpses into what heaven will be like. Think of a place where we will be free from sin; where pollution cannot enter; where the righteous shall reign forever with Jesus. Think of a city that is not built with human hands; where the buildings do not grow old with time. Think of a city whose streets are crime free; a city without grief, sorrow or death.

But wait, there's more! In heaven we will also have new bodies and there will be no more tiredness and exhaustion; no more aches and pains; no more cancer or other diseases; no more arthritis; no more glasses, walking sticks or hearing aids. We will all be changed into a heavenly body that is perfect and all our senses will be perfect like they were meant to be! Heaven will be a place where there will be:

- No more fear
- No more murder
- No more guilt and shame
- No more fighting to do what's right
- No more Satan
- No more demons
- No more temptation
- No more struggle
- No more Tears
- No more being hurt by people
- No more being let down by others
- No more depression
- No more loneliness
- No more low self-esteem
- No more problems
- No more wants

Heaven is the 'New Jerusalem' the Bible speaks about. That Holy City in the spiritual realm where everything is perfect, eternal, unblemished and pure. The only light is the light of God and the residents are all those He has purchased and cleansed with His own blood.

Follow the link below - close your eyes and let God lift you out of the woes of this world for just a few minutes. <https://youtu.be/7BM9E1hEVrg>

So today as I have been describing to you what heaven will be like, hopefully all of you are getting more excited about heaven and what it holds in store for each one of us. But wait ... I haven't told you the best part about heaven ... we don't have to wait to begin enjoying heaven!

Every time we mention the word *heaven*, we automatically think of a place we go after we have finished our time on earth. That is certainly true. The fullness of heaven will only be experienced when we are free from the sin and the limitations of this earthly life. But the Bible says we don't have to wait to *begin* our experience of heaven because Jesus brought heaven to us. When Jesus came in the flesh He said, *"The Kingdom of heaven is here. It is among you. It is within you."* And when He gave His disciples, and us, instructions concerning how we pray, He told us to pray, *"May your kingdom come and your will be done on earth as it is in heaven."*

This often recited prayer has a hidden treasure in it which so many of us miss. Heaven is not a place 'off' the earth – 'in the sky' – in spite of that picture being given in the Bible. Heaven is that spiritual place, that spiritual reality where Jesus Christ is Lord and ruler of all.

When the Bible tells us to pray that heaven will be experienced here on earth, it is talking about the rule and reign of Jesus Christ. And so when we think of heaven, let's forget about an 'up there' idea or an 'after life' idea and start thinking about heaven being right here, in front of our noses – on the other side of an invisible membrane, if you want to imagine that.

Actually, it's even more personal than that. We need to embrace heaven 'in here.' When we give Jesus His rightful place as ruler and Lord, then we are transported through that membrane into the Kingdom of God, and heaven is then within us, as Christ is within us.

There is a wonderful line in a beautiful worship song I want to teach you one day soon. The song is called, 'What a Beautiful Name it is' and the line is this: *"You didn't want heaven without us - so Jesus, You brought heaven down."*

Get your mind around that reality and I guarantee you will be homesick for heaven every day for there is no better place for us to be than in the presence of our Lord and our King. Little by little, day by day, God wants us to make that journey - until that day, sooner or later, when His Kingdom is the only kingdom we will know. Praise God for that day, but praise Him also for today – and every day we get to pray and believe and live these words: *"Your kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven!"*

Amen