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Isaiah 9:1-4, Matthew 4:12-23

First Presbyterian Church, Champaign, IL

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Where is your home?

Is home where you live, or where you're from? Is home a state of mind? Billy Joel sings about having a New York State of Mind. Jimmy Buffet sings about a place called Margaritaville.

Where is *your* home?

When you go "home" for the holidays, where do you go? Some say home is where the heart is, or where your family is. To a large degree, my home is where my sons are, and, of course, where my wife is. (And my dog, Casey.)

When I write, I return to a setting on the Eastern Shore of Virginia. I never lived there, but I spent a lot time there. The Parramore roots of my family have been rooted there since 1622.^[1] The shore is my imaginary home.

To a large degree, home is where I was born and grew up: Hampton, Virginia. Home is sailing on the harbor there, from Fort Monroe to the Newport News Point. Home is the sunny days of my childhood walking on the sandbars, rowing Indian River Creek, playing football on Watson Field. Home is High's Ice Cream, long walks on Chesapeake Boulevard, visiting with the Wythe Girls, hanging with the friends I grew up with.

Where is your home?

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Here in Matthew's Gospel, Matthew is teaching his readers by way of sacred geography. In this context, place matters. Jesus left the home in which he grew up, Nazareth, and traveled some 30-miles east as scripture puts it to "make his home" in Capernaum, a fishing village by the Sea of Galilee.

The place is significant. Capernaum and the surrounding territory—Zebulun and Naphtali—had been part of the Northern Kingdom of Israel. This is where the Assyrians first attacked Israel. The tribes of Zebulun and Naphtali were the first tribes of the ten northern tribes to be decimated, to be carted off into exile. It is here the sheep of Israel were scattered. This very ground had been watered with their blood. Under these skies they cried out to God. And Jesus has now come to restore what was so long and so badly broken.

Matthew wants his readers to think historically. He quotes from the chapters (7-12) of the prophet Isaiah known as the "Book of Emmanuel" in which Isaiah writes to a wayward people about a time of future hope: *But there'll be no darkness for those who were in trouble. Earlier, [God] did bring the lands of Zebulun and Naphtali into disrepute, but the time is coming when he'll make that whole area glorious!*^[2] (The Message).

This time of hope that Isaiah had written about hundreds of years before has dawned. This day has dawned in Jesus. Matthew is saying all of this by simply reporting that Jesus went to make his home in Capernaum, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali. Jesus has come to gather the scattered flock from the point from which they were scattered.

Jesus has left his home to make a home for his people. “Repent,” he says. He preached, and healed, and told people about the good news of this home—this kingdom of heaven—not made with hands, but made by God for the people of God, for the scattered, the battered, the lost.

* * *

It is there from his home base in Capernaum that Jesus began calling disciples to help him.^[3] Peter, Andrew, James, and John will immediately drop what they are doing to follow.

We modern-day disciples are called, too. We may follow less immediately and, perhaps, less enthusiastically, but Jesus left his home to make a home in our midst. Jesus invites us to make a home with God at the center. He invites us to make a home where strangers are welcome, where neighbors are loved, where the neighborhood includes everybody, where everyone is encouraged, where a community of shalom is nurtured.

No matter where we live, this is the home we are called to build. This is the kind of welcome we are called to extend. This is what Jesus preached and lived. This is the work his followers are called to do.

* * *

Where is your home?

My truest home is right here, in the church. My first home was Community Presbyterian Church in Hampton. My home now is here at First Pres Champaign. My home is Faith Presbyterian Church in Cape Coral. My home is Knox Presbyterian Church in Naperville. My home is the place wherever Christ’s arms are reaching out to welcome people who have once been scattered, battered, lost. My home is the church in which all God’s children are welcome, nurtured, and celebrated. My home is the church where we hold hands to praise the God who calls us to serve, to love, to heal.

Jesus left his home to make his home in our midst.

Friends, welcome home.

Isaiah 9:1-4

¹But there will be no gloom for those who were in anguish. In the former time he brought into contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the latter time he will make glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations.

² The people who walked in darkness
have seen a great light;
those who lived in a land of deep darkness —
on them light has shined.

³ You have multiplied the nation,
you have increased its joy;
they rejoice before you
as with joy at the harvest,
as people exult when dividing plunder.

⁴ For the yoke of their burden,
and the bar across their shoulders,
the rod of their oppressor,
you have broken as on the day of Midian.

Gospel Matthew 4:12-23

¹²Now when Jesus heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew to Galilee. ¹³He left Nazareth and made his home in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, ¹⁴so that what had been spoken through the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled:

¹⁵ “Land of Zebulun, land of Naphtali,
on the road by the sea, across the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles —

¹⁶ the people who sat in darkness
have seen a great light,
and for those who sat in the region and shadow of death
light has dawned.”

¹⁷From that time Jesus began to proclaim, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.”

¹⁸As he walked by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea — for they were fishermen. ¹⁹And he said to them, “Follow me, and I will make you fish for people.” ²⁰Immediately they left their nets and followed him. ²¹As he went from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John, in the boat with their father Zebedee, mending their nets, and he called them. ²²Immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed him.

²³Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and curing every disease and every sickness among the people.

[1] In my writing, I make up towns there, like Rooksville or Evidence Gap, which are a lot like the real towns of Cape Charles and Quinby. The novel that I’m currently dabbling in takes place on the ocean side of the shore in an old town much like Accomack.

[2] — *the road along the Sea, the country past the Jordan, international Galilee.*

[3] That he called twelve perhaps gets us thinking about how God in Jesus Christ would restore all twelve tribes of Israel.