**Text**: Revelation 21:1-6a & John 11:32-44

 **The Bethel Pulpit**

 **Pastor Roger Black**

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 312 Wisconsin Ave, Madison WI 53703

**Theme**: “The Hope of Home Realized Now,
and Promised for Eternity”

Two verses I want to emphasize from today’s text from Revelation 21:3-4 [The Message] “I heard a voice thunder from the Throne: ‘Look! Look! God has moved into the neighborhood, making his home with men and women! They’re his people, he’s their God. He’ll wipe every tear from their eyes. Death is gone for good, tears gone, crying gone, pain gone, all the first order of things gone.’”

“There’s No Place Like Home. There’s No Place Like Home.” Although these words originate from 19th century opera writer John Howard Payne, the movie The Wizard of Oz indelibly imprints this phrase in our minds. We can visualize it as we recall the film that some of us have seen upwards of twenty times. We can see Dorothy clapping together her new-found ruby slippers, and following good witch Glinda by saying these words, to go home. She does make it back home, surrounded by her hometown friends and family. Although she has been transformed by her less than perfect trip to see the wizard in Oz, she is so glad to get home.

Many of us consider “home” to be among our most favorite places to go. “Home, Sweet Home” we call it. Why is this? Our loved ones—our family—are at home. Home gives us a sense of security. We feel safe within the confines of home. It is our sanctuary. Even though we may love to go to visit many places around the globe, returning home is symbolically all important. When we return home, we know we will be in familiar surroundings—in our own bed—with familiar food and drink—enjoying the people and things that we have accumulated that make us know we are home. We know we are loved.

 If home is where we want to be right now, then home is the greatest hope for us in the future as well. So, as we commemorate All Saints Sunday it is important for us to remember our connections to God and to other people of faith. Since our baptism we are connected to God, a relationship which in faith will be with there always. God will dwell with us forever. Ultimately, we are comforted to know that we will be at home in the presence of God for all eternity. We also hope that we will have some of the other amenities of home, including being in the presence of people we know. We hope that as the psalmist puts it in Psalm 23 in Today’s English Version. “God’s House Will be Our Home Forever.”

Today-- as we commemorate All Saints Sunday, let us reflect on this image or metaphor (symbol) of “home” for understanding our life with Christ. We give thanks for all those who gave us a home or made a home for us. We celebrate the joys of home. Knowing full well that God already dwells with us, we look forward to an eternal home with God.

First, we give thanks to God for our home, our dwelling with Christ, now. As we do, we first think about how God gave us family and home when we first come into the world. Most of us do absolutely nothing to create our home, either here on earth or in eternity. We have a home by the grace of God and others. We are born into the world because our parents decided to have us. Dr. Alvin Rogness includes the amenities of home in his cataloging of all the things God gives to us in his devotional, Debtors All. “The ground I toddled on, the four walls I lived in, and the young lady I married are all gifts of God. So we always remain debtors to God.”

Robert Frost writes about the “grace of home” in a poem entitled “Death of a Hired Man.” “‘Home is the place where, when you have to go there, they have to take you in.’ ‘I should have called it Something you somehow haven’t to deserve.’”

 Second, our new birth in the family of God also comes by the gracious provision from God. At our baptisms, by God’s grace we are given our Christian home and family. We are made sons and daughters of God, with parents and godparents who will travel with us in person at least in the earliest part of our journey. Throughout our lives wherever we may go to worship or learn, our Christian family of the baptized goes with us. The congregation in which we worship is a symbol, or reminder, of the larger Christian family of all the saints, past and present, of which we are a part.

Our gracious God is the source of our Christian home, as God is for our domestic home. The evangelist John has a good way of putting this in our text that places the “getting home” in God’s hands. In verse three a loud voice from the throne in John’s vision proclaims in words of the Good News version: “ “Now God's [home](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Revelation+21:1-6&version=GNT) is with people! He will live with them, and they shall be his people. God himself will be with them, and he will be their God.” As God makes God’s home with us, so we are to stay close to God. When Jesus gets His disciples ready for His leaving this earth, Jesus says: “I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you….Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and **make our home with them**.” Truly, if we stay close to Jesus we won’t have to search for our eternal home, but we will always be at home with God. God will dwell with us.

 I visualize “always being home with God” as being like the turtle that has his shell on his back. Turtles do not need to find their way home at night. They travel with their home. Some people try out this concept of “being a turtle” by selling their home and buying a recreational vehicle, which will be their home. If they pull their home hooked up to a truck, they are often called “fifth wheelers.” Their dwelling is with them all of the time. If we are people who love God we will be fifth wheelers, dependent upon God to pick us up and pull us along the way. We will never lose our way on our journey because God is at home with us.

 But unlike the turtle sometimes we saints who are still in the world abandon the ship of our home. Some of us don’t want to stay at home with God—at least in the same house we grew up in. We get the itch to try out other religious beliefs. We may even try out not believing in God at all. Sometimes we may lose our way and do not know the way to go home. It is exactly there at that time that our gracious heavenly parent will come looking for us. Like the father of the prodigal son, our gracious God will not settle down…will continue to pace… until every child that can be found is home. As the popular Christian youth song, Blind Man, puts it: “Blind Man stood by the road and he cried, ‘Show me the way home. Jesus cried, ‘I am the way, I am the truth, I am the life. And the way to go home.”

The Good News is that God never abandons us. Instead, God waits for us. As Jesus says in John 15 “I am the true vine; you are the branches.” He goes on in words interpreted in The Message: “Make [your home](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John+15:1-8&version=MSG) in me just as I do in you. In the same way that a branch can’t bear grapes by itself but only by being joined to the vine, you can’t bear fruit unless you are joined with me. If you make yourselves at home with me and my words are at [home](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John+15:1-8&version=MSG) in you, you can be sure that whatever you ask will be listened to and acted upon.”

From the time of our baptisms, God lives in us. That is why on All Saints Sunday we remember those who have begun their journey with God at their baptism. God wants to keep us close all of our lives. But God looks for our response of following Him. The Good News is that as long as we stay close to God, we don’t have to worry about our eternal home. We don’t have to know exactly what the shape of that home may be. For we are already at home with God; the home God prepares for us is similar, but deeper than the love and care we feel from God throughout our lives.

All Saints Sunday for me is about the “sure and certain hope of a home with God.” We use these similar words at the graveside, as we give our loved one over to God: “In **sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life** through our Lord Jesus Christ, we commend to Almighty God our brother or sister and we commit his or her body to the ground; earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust.” We turn to Scripture to find the basis of our hope, our assurance of always being with God. Paul writes to the Philippians in chapter 1, verse 21: “For to me, living is Christ and dying is gain.” In 1 Peter 1 we read: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading.” Our hope for our home is in Christ who already has conquered homelessness and has given us an eternal home. Our hope is in the ultimate builder, God. With Abraham we look to the words of the writer of Hebrews in chapter 11: “For Abraham looked forward to the city that has foundations, whose architect and builder is God. By faith he looked forward to the fulfillment of the promise of many descendants of faith. With many others he died in faith without having received the promises, but from a distance they saw and greeted them. They confessed that they were strangers and foreigners on the earth, for people who speak in this way make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. If they had been thinking of the land that they had left behind, they would have had opportunity to return. But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore, God is not ashamed to be called their God; indeed, he has prepared a city for them.”

 We long to be at home with God in eternity. St. Augustine, a fourth century saint who was Bishop of Hippo in Algeria, put it this way: “You have made us for yourself, O God. Our hearts are restless, O Lord, until they rest in you.”

 From the time of our baptism God dwells in us. The rest of our lives is our taking care of this relationship with God until the day we are born into a richer and unfiltered relationship with God… when those who have traveled thus far on the journey with us will light the candle in our memory and we will know the presence of the home, the abiding place, of the God who made us and dwells in us.

A final vision of home…much like that of Dorothy in the Wizard of Oz*.* Dorothy returns home and finds that the people on her journey were the same people who have loved her all along. So, our vision of homecoming may be. We get a foretaste of this in our reception of the Lord’s Supper around the table of grace. Just as we may be surprised here at who the saints—the forgiven sinners—may be around the table, so through God’s grace others may be surprised in the final communion of saints. This is illustrated so well in the 1984 movie Places of the Heart about a young widow’s struggle to hold on to her farm in a small Texas town during the depression. In the final scene of the movie Edna, the widow played by Sally Field, gathers around a table with all of those who have helped her keep it. It is a kind of final communion of the saints where the town is really all related, no matter how at odds or far away they seemed during the story. The widower shares this special communion of the saints with all who helped her retain the farm against all odds. Even the African American man who has worked heroically on Edna’s farm gives communion to his white neighbors who cannot in that Texas small town receive him. They can receive the body and blood of Christ from him at the table. This is a picture of the home God seeks to have with God’s people. So may we all seek a God who is so gracious, our gracious God who gives us hope to live each day. May we work toward making the world more like this picture of home. Amen.