

“Show Me The Way To Go Home” Ruth McCowan
April 20, 2008

Readings: Acts 7: 55 – 60; 1 Peter 2: 2 – 10; John 14: 1 - 14

There is a story about Albert Einstein who as he sat deep in thought aboard the train that brought him home each night, and the porter approached to collect his ticket, Einstein rummaged around in his coat, through his pockets, in his shirt, and everywhere else he could think of, growing alarmed at his inability to find the ticket. If you can recall a similar event in your life when you've looked for something everywhere but can't seem to find it, you will understand Einstein's frustration at not being able to locate his ticket.

When the porter gets to Einstein, he says, “That's okay, Dr. Einstein,” I know you ride this train every day. I can collect the ticket tomorrow.” Einstein responded, “That's fine for you, young man but how am I supposed to know where to get off the train without my ticket?”

I believe that this is the message behind the gospel reading today. Do we know where we are going? How do we get home?

Most of us recall hearing the words in the context of a funeral, during the loss of a loved one, “Do not let your hearts be troubled, . Believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house there are many rooms or many dwelling places, depending on the translation that is being read. Hearing those words may even bring you back to another time and another place.

If we place these words into the context of when they were first spoken, we will see Jesus who has just had the Passover meal with his disciples. He has washed their feet in an act of servanthood. He has foretold his betrayal which Judas will soon perform. He has predicted Peter's denial. He has told them he is leaving. But he adds these words of hope: Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house there are many rooms. I go to prepare a place for you and will come again and take you to myself. So that where I am, you may be also. Jesus is giving his disciples (and us) a word of hope and comfort as they will experience disappointment, disillusionment, and loss before they pass through the darkness of grief into the light and promise of new life.

This morning, I would like to explore with you this word of promise that Jesus gives to us.

I've entitled this sermon *Show Me The Way To Go Home*. Some of you may recognize the title as not being very original. It is the title of a song that the residents enjoy where I work as a chaplain in a seniors care facility. Yes, it's a drinking song. “Show me the way to go home. I'm tired and I want to go to bed.

I had a drink about an hour ago and it went straight to my head.” It’s a silly song with a serious side to it. Just like Einstein, the person in the song is looking for someone to guide him home. We all need the sense of home in our life – with ourselves, with others, and with God.

There was a film a few years ago called *The Notebook* where Noah’s wife, Allie, was living in an Alzheimer’s care unit. The husband, Noah, spent as much time as he possibly could with her though she rarely would break through the memory-stealing fog to recognize him. When the two gather outside with their family, their grown children say to their father, “Come home with us, she doesn’t know you.” He looks at them in surprise. “Your mother is my home” This is such a sweet breath-stealing line. But the question remains, what happens when Allie dies? Where will Noah be? Where will he be when his sense of home dies?

Jesus did not want to leave the disciples with that sense of homelessness. If we put all our faith in someone or something and then that thing or that person is gone then we become homeless, with no direction in life, looking for the ticket in our pocket wondering where to get off.

Some years ago radio evangelist Charles E. Fuller announced that he would speak the following Sunday about “Heaven.” It was to be broadcast on radio.

During that week he received a letter from an old man who was very ill. I’d like to read part of his letter:

“Next Sunday you are to talk about “Heaven.” I am interested in that land because I have held a clear title to a bit of property there for over 55 years. I did not buy it. It was given to me without money and without price. But the donor purchased it for me at a tremendous sacrifice. I am not holding it for speculation since the title is non-transferable. It is not a vacant lot. “For more than a half-century I have been sending material out of which the greatest architect and builder of the universe has been building a home for me, which will never need to be repaired because it will suit me perfectly, individually, and will never grow old.” “Termites can never undermine its foundation for it rests upon the Rock of Ages. Fire cannot destroy it. Floods cannot wash it away. No locks or bolts will ever be placed upon its doors, for no vicious person can ever enter that land where my dwelling stands, now almost completed and ready for me to enter it and abide in peace eternally without fear of being ejected.”

“There is a valley of deep shadow between the place where I live in California and that to which I shall journey in a very short time. I cannot reach my home in the City of God without passing through the dark valley of shadows. But I am not afraid, because the best friend that I have ever had went through the same valley alone, a long, long time ago and drove away all the gloom. He has stuck by me through thick and thin since we first met and became acquainted 55 years ago,

and I hold His promise in printed form, never to forsake nor to leave me alone. He will be with me as I walk through the valley of shadows, and I shall not lose my way when He is with me.”

“I hope to hear your sermon on “Heaven” next Sunday from my home, but I have no assurance that I shall be able to do so. My ticket to heaven has no date marked for the journey ... no return coupon ... and no permit for baggage. Yes, I am ready to go and may not be here while you are talking next Sunday, but I shall meet you there some day.”

The writer of that letter had clear sense of where he was going. He clearly had his eyes set on his destination.

We heard in our reading from Acts about Stephen today – the first follower of Christ who was killed for his testimony. We heard about his death and his final testimony as he died. As the stones of the angry mob fell on him, he prayed with great confidence for himself: “Lord Jesus, receive my Spirit” and as he suffered and died he did not judge or condemn those who did not believe but instead, as Jesus did on the cross for us, he prayed for them saying: “Lord, do not hold this sin against them.” Stephen knew beyond a shadow of a doubt what was stamped on his ticket. He had his eyes fixed on his destination.

And we heard in the words of Peter to the churches in Asia Minor – and to us. Listen to the words again:

“You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.”

Peter is not only reminding us where we are going. He is reminding who we are and whose we are.

So often, I believe in our living, that we lose sight of our heavenly destination and we lose sight of who we are and whose we are so the texts this morning are great reminders for all of us. Especially during those times when we experience disappointments, hardships, loss, we have to stop and like Einstein, as if looking for that lost ticket, we need to re-focus and ask ourselves where we are going, what’s the purpose in all of this and remember who we are and whose we are and things will come into focus again.

I would like to close with a song and don’t worry, I’m not going to try to sing it. The song is called *I Can Only Imagine*. This song was written and recorded by a band called MercyMe. Millard, whose father died in 1991 due to cancer, wrote

the song in 1999 by drawing on his thoughts and personal faith about what one would experience upon meeting Jesus in heaven.

Words:

I can only imagine What it will be like When I walk By your side

I can only imagine What my eyes will see When your face Is before me I can only imagine

[Chorus:]

Surrounded by Your glory, what will my heart feel
Will I dance for you Jesus or in awe of you be still
Will I stand in your presence or to my knees will I fall
Will I sing hallelujah, will I be able to speak at all
I can only imagine

I can only imagine When that day comes And I find myself Standing in the Son

I can only imagine When all I will do Is forever Forever worship You I can only imagine

[Chorus]

I can only imagine *[x2]*

I can only imagine When all I will do Is forever, forever worship you

Let us pray:

Thank you, Gracious God for loving us so much that you sent your Son to us to show us the way home. Help us in our living to keep our eyes on you and to remember who we are and whose we are in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.