

Reflections on Coming Home

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The following are some excerpts from her message given to Friends of Jesus Church, 10/9/2008.

At this moment, I am in the throes of an experience unlike any I have been through before: the experience of coming home. I have come home both to the geographical area of Washington DC where I grew up, and I have come home to the places where my closest family members reside, and have never left. Up until eight months ago, for nearly 25 years, I have lived away. I've remained a frequent visitor to "home", meaning I visited my family regularly, not infrequently, and have rarely, (if ever) missed a family occasion, Christmas or summer visit home. I have moved around a fair bit in my adult life, but my compass point for "home" never changed, as it always meant going home to Mom & Dad.

I literally grew up in the Church of The Saviour. My parents, Bill & Sunny Branner, were some of the Church's earliest members. So many of life's landmark events have occurred for us within this home community: Gordon Cosby married Mom & Dad in 1950, I was christened by Gordon as an infant, I attended worship at 2025 on countless Sunday mornings, where, in addition to trying to quietly sit in the same noisy, creaky chairs still used there, I was taught Sunday school by Elizabeth Anne Campagna, (Mary Cosby's sister), and then later on by a young Jim Dickerson. I remember Elizabeth O'Connor very well. I was baptized by Gordon in the lake at Dayspring as a teenager, married by Gordon as a young woman, and more recently, with Gordon and many of you, saw my father out of this life and into his next at the end of December 2006 when he died from cancer.

Time to Move Back Home

My mother was then alone after almost 57 years of marriage.



She has advanced macular degeneration, and over the last ten years or so had become entirely dependent upon my father for keeping the stuff of every day life going for the two of them. I felt that, clearly, it was time to move back, and my job search began, and as things worked out I not only came home to DC, home to live close to Mom, but also home to the extended Church of The Saviour community, home to employment as Executive Director of the Festival Center, and to the Friends of Jesus faith community, that felt like *home* the first time I came as a visitor.

So I have come "home"; it seems things have fit neatly into place, and the Great Move has come and gone. But much to my surprise, now that I am here, I find I greatly underestimated the breadth and depth of this homecoming experience, and the powerful impact it has had, and continues to have, on me.

And so, when Frederick Buechner writes in his lovely book, **The Longing for Home**, "home is where you feel that all is somehow ultimately well even if things aren't going all that well at any given moment", I'm still not sure this relocation, this coming home, has brought me yet to that place. I'm still dizzy from so many shifts in my orientation.

Deepening My Roots

But...here is something very amazing! Even as my perceptions and homecoming adjustments see-saw around, I'm regaining stability

and steadfastness as never before, setting out deeper roots than ever before, like a windswept tree on the side of a cliff that leans and bends, but doesn't become uprooted...because I've come home to a refreshed, deeper understanding of what it means to belong to God, to live in a new home with Jesus, and to take up a residence in this old, (yet new) place in Him. This I believe is what John talks about in 1 John 4, when he states that "when we take up permanent residence in a life of love, we live in God and God lives in us." This is where true 'home' is, and where He longs for us to be. This is where our truest sense of belonging begins and ends. Our personal journeys, whether they be geographical, spiritual, or emotional, take us nowhere unless they lead us more deeply into a life of love, God's love, the love we were gifted when he sent Jesus Christ into the world so that we might live through and with him.

How do we get there? That is, how do we come home? One of my favorite scripture passages helps me answer these questions, from Ephesians 4..."to know the whole truth and tell it in love, like Christ in everything." This is our home, our God-guided destination, to reside in the divine, really is, as Buechner described, "a very special place with very special attributes which make it clearly distinguishable from all other places."

Changes Necessary

No wonder nothing is the same here at home, (not that I

expected it to be), because life in the world's Realm brings us change, the fear of change, confusion and sorrow. Until we get hold of clinging to and residing in and with His love, we are bound to feel untethered, unanchored, and unmoored. Our homecoming to God is a liberation from the burdens that go with the act of change, and of changing place.

The only constant we have is the constant of God's love, and this promise that He will never, ever leave us. He will not leave us home-less. God already has a place for us prepared in His house, He has already invited us in, leaving there nothing to be done other than to "go there", go home to Him in our hearts and minds and spirits. This 'relocation' is the only one that is full of freedom and celebration. This core of Divine Love is home, and it doesn't change or shift over time. We can always move closer to it, and return to it, again and again, and it will always be the same.

When the time comes for each of us to finally go home, that is, in the move out of this life and into a new one with God, we will know even more fully the meaning of His love for us, and where our ultimate home lies.

So I am here, growing in understanding of what it means to come home, and growing in understanding of what it means to be called home to God, and to live in Him. What a homecoming!



Home is where God's people are found