

## Welcome Home

Feb 7, 2011

I'm going to make my remarks short today, because I think that the thing that is needful in this moment is that we celebrate our belonging together in the family of God, the "Body of Christ." Especially today as we affirm the membership of our brother and sisters who have formally joined us.

It is a good time for us to just be together and soak in the fact that this is our family and the church is our spiritual home. Beyond these walls our country and the world are going through serious trauma. There is much anger, finger-pointing and potential for violence.

But inside these walls, it doesn't have to be that way. Because this is our sanctuary, a place to call home. Our home does not belong to Democrats or to Republicans, to conservatives or to liberals, to Black, white or brown, to rich or poor or to any of the groups that would claim ownership. This house belongs to God's alone, and we are all first and foremost children of God; members of God's family.

And inside these walls we live by God's rules, which means that we are committed to loving each other as Christ loved us. So that nothing that goes on outside these walls should have the power to define us in ways that separate us from each other. Here we are to be defined by the will and grace of God who is our loving Father (also our loving mother).

Home is a place where we can learn to relax and let ourselves be a part of what God created us to be; where we can sink into the joy that comes from being the brothers and sisters to each other that we actually are and where we can extend that knowledge to all who enter, by the way we extend the hand of friendship.

Here in God's house, we are not to be each other's judges. There are no perfect people here. Every one of us is what Martin Luther called "simul justus et peccator," simultaneously a sinner and a saint. And God bids us share our understandings with each other in a Spirit of compassion and respect, and to let God be the judge.

It's interesting that our Gospel reading describes almost the opposite of what I am saying. When Jesus came to his own hometown, his reception was anything but motivated by God's love. At first, everybody was pleasantly surprised. Because he was a hometown boy, they presumed that he had come primarily for their benefit. And they quickly turned on him, when his first act was to let them know that he did not see them as having any priority at all. Instead, he saw them as adversaries to God's work, and started providing examples.

It was a situation in which Jesus spoke a hard and unpopular truth in their midst, a truth that forced them to look for the source of sin and destruction, where they least wanted to acknowledge it; within themselves. And so the willingness to hear and consider things that convict and upset us, is also very much a part of what it means to be part of God's family. God's love is gracious and merciful, but God is not a parent who overly shelters or hides the children from painful truths. But when a painful truth is received in a spirit of repentance, it becomes another gateway to life.

I guess I really want to make one point this morning. This is our home. This is your home. This is my home. "Welcome, welcome home!" I say this with sheer audacity in front of many of you who have been here all your lives, when I have only been here one year. And I say it with gratitude to one who owns this house and who holds your hearts and mine.

We don't have much control over what happens on the larger stage of our society, where the reporting is constantly negative and judgmental and where the spinmasters make it hard for us to distinguish truth from fantasy.

But here in this place, we are not helpless or forced to give in to the negative narrative about how everything is collapsing. Here on the local level and in this house, we don't need to rely on second hand reporting that is covered in political spin. We can see each other with our own eyes and we can respond in obedience to the sane dictates of the God of love, who cares about the well-being of every last one of his children. No matter what happens in our world, here in this church we can come to live and cultivate sane lives, treating everyone we encounter with the compassion and dignity that belongs to all God's children and leaving the judgement to God. I call that "good news."