

# “Where’s Home?”

Psalm 90 and John 14:1-3

*“Lord, You have always been our home.”*

(Psalm 90:1 TEV)

For fifteen-years I traveled across our denomination supporting spiritual renewal among Presbyterians.

During those years I met some wonderful people. In an honest attempt to get acquainted, many of them tended to ask me one question more than any other – “*Where’s home?*” It’s a normal way of making a connection.

For many, this is an easy question to answer. It may be that way for you. You might be able to say, “Florida is my home, right here in Sarasota.” Perhaps you’ve been here all your life. If anyone asked you, “*Where’s Home?*” you’d know the answer.

For me, however – a member of the vagabond generation – it’s never been quite that simple. I’m not trying to be cute about the question of *home*. It’s just that I’m not always sure what the questioner is hoping to learn.

## **Paul, Where’s Home?**

Sometimes people want to know, “Where were you born?”

My answer to this question may be curious but unsatisfying. I was born in Kobe, Japan. Sometimes people follow up and ask why I was born there? Usually I tell them, “That’s where my mother was!”

She was born in India, but grew up in Japan as a missionary child. After college she was teaching music in Kobe when she met my father. He had gone to Japan at the urging of his missionary brother who assured dad that teaching jobs were available there as the Great Depression began.

“Well then, Paul, is Japan your home?”

No way! I may have been born there, but I certainly would not feel ‘at home’ there.

“Then *Where’s Home*, Paul?”

I grew up in Miami where my father was a professor of Far Eastern history at the University. Back then Miami was a great place for a kid. Sure it was hot and humid, but for me it was also beaches and palm trees! I was a ‘summer child’ – never even saw snow until I was ten.

“Well, is that your home, Paul – Miami?”

Are you kidding? I can’t even speak the language most folks use there today!

“So, *Where’s Home*, Paul?”

We moved to Washington, DC during the Second World War. As a specialist in the Far East, my father was called into the war effort. The Nation’s Capital was a great place to finish growing up. School field trips introduced me to all the Americana landmarks we regularly see on the evening news.

“So, is that it? Is Washington your home, Paul?”

Hardly! Sure I know my way around there, but I certainly don’t feel ‘at home’ there.

“Then, *Where’s Home*, Paul?”

After college, there was seminary in New Jersey followed by graduate work in Scotland. I served churches in Virginia, South Carolina, Georgia and Florida. Each had its attractions, challenges and satisfactions.

“Are any of these home for you, Paul?”

Not really, we have wonderful memories of all the places we have lived and served, but nothing even close to homesickness.

“So, Paul, give it up – Where *is* Home?”

Well by now, we've pretty much come to the end of our vagabond wanderings. When we married 53 years ago, my wife told me, "There's only one rule – warmer is better than colder!" We both feel we've finally arrived at the warmest place we're going to find.

"So, *this* is home?" Well, let's not jump to conclusions just yet.

## **Moses, Where's Home?**

A while back I was studying Psalm 90 – familiar to us because it's read at almost every funeral. The first verse trips lightly off our tongues: "*Lord, Thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations...*"

I remember picking up the *TEV* version of the Bible – the so-called *Good News Bible* – and flipping to Psalm 90. There the first verse leaped out at me, "*Lord, you have always been our home...*"

Somehow it had not dawned on my slow brain that what the older translations called a "*dwelling place*" we today call a "*home*." That's when I noticed the title of the Psalm. You remember from your reading that most of the Psalms have a title like 'A Psalm of David,' that sort of thing.

Psalm 90 bears this title, "*A Prayer of Moses, the Man of God*"! It is the only Psalm in the entire Psalter ascribed to Moses. You can see why as you read the Psalm through and pick up on themes appropriate to Moses. Perhaps, then, we could ask Moses our question.

"Moses *Where's Home* – Egypt?"

Ah, Egypt! Moses might answer. In the land of the Pharaohs I was a royal prince of Egypt with every advantage a young man could want. But I lost favor and got thrown out. No, Egypt is not my home.

"Then, *Where's Home*, Moses – Jethro's tent?"

Jethro, I can hear Moses say, now there was a man! I got my wife from among his lovely daughters. He had more common sense than ten men, and taught me valuable lessons I needed to know about management and leadership skills. But Jethro's tent – my home? No way!

“Okay, but *Where’s Home*, Moses – the Wilderness of Sinai?”

Sinai, we might hear Moses muse. I spent forty hot, weary, troubled years wandering in that desert, trying to shape a rag-tag group of Hebrew slaves into a nation ruled by God’s laws and obedient to God’s justice. But I assure you the Wilderness of Sinai is not my home.

“Then *Where’s Home*, Moses – the Promised Land?”

Never even got there! Moses would admit. I came close though. I climbed Mount Nebo and gazed across the Jordan River. I saw the Promised Land, but I never set foot on its holy ground. My people went into the Land without me. No, the Promised Land is not my home.

“Then, Moses – *Where is Home?*”

And Moses said, “*Lord, You have always been our home...*”

## **What Is Home?**

Still today many of us are trying to learn Moses’ lesson. ‘Home’ is not about location or architecture. It’s about relationships. This valuable truth got reinforced early along in our family. I think I shared with you a bit of this story last Christmas, but it bears repeating at this point.

The first home we ever owned burned on Christmas Eve four decades ago. Thankfully, we were not there. We had taken off for a brief after-Christmas vacation at a place unknown to us then – a little cottage on a Key called Longboat, in a city we had never even visited, Sarasota!

We received news of the fire from a friend and neighbor back in Virginia. As we drove home we tried to imagine the worst a fire could do. We didn’t come close! On a cold and dreary December day, our little family walked silently and soberly through the gutted remains of our home.

The congregation had arranged a rental for us, filled it with borrowed furniture, linens and kitchenware. They even stocked the pantry with food. But most touching of all, someone had pawed through the ashes, figured out the toys the kids had been given and replaced them!

We gathered in the front room of our little rented house, Jan and I and our two small children. Holding hands together I tried to say, we've lost a lot, but we haven't lost what's most important – each other!

That's when our appreciation of home got deepened. Home is not about neighborhood or curb appeal, it's not about geography or style. Home is about loving relationships. To put it personally, home is where Jan is, where memories are cherished and love is shared.

### **Like A Child At Home**

Paul Tournier, the renowned and beloved Christian Psychiatrist, wrote an excellent little book called *A Place for You*.

All of us have important 'places' in our lives – the tree fort out in the back yard, that shady nook beside the lake where you proposed, a sacred spot you've set apart for prayer, a secluded natural sanctuary where you can be quiet and listen, your old church brimming full with memories.

Tournier reflects on the secret and personal places that so effect and enrich our lives – places where memories are treasured and life is nurtured. In the end, Tournier explores Christ's gracious promise "*to go and prepare a place for you*" (John 14:2).

Believers know their "*place*" will be with Christ. Heaven is about 'going home.' Eternal life is a relationship – an intimate, loving, personal and eternal relationship! – with Jesus Christ our Lord.

When at last we are 'at home' with Christ, we may reflect back and realize that our earthly experience of 'home' – even at its best! – was only an *hors d'oeuvre*! The main course is Christ himself! When we are personally and eternally with Christ we will finally be 'home.'

*"Lord, You have always been our home."*

All this was reinforced for me in a moment of worship some years ago. I was a 'leader of the Service' that Sunday, but like you I also need someone to lead me into worship. Music has often served me here. At times it draws me deeper into the awareness and experience of God.

The Worship Service was almost over, but my own inward sense of worshiping remained unfilled. In their liturgy the offering came at the end of the service. As the plates were being passed, the organist began playing. But who bothers to listen to the Offertory? *I do...and I did.*

She played an arrangement of a hymn I dearly love, “My Shepherd Will Supply My Need” based on the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm.

Isaac Watts paraphrased the familiar words of David’s beloved Psalm. Then Watts returned his poetry to the church – a spiritual gift! – a hymn we cherish to this day. We sing his inspired words to the haunting melody of an American folk tune.

As the organist played, I whispered to myself the words of the hymn. I found myself becoming strangely moved as together she and I came to the final stanza. Everyone knows how the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm ends:

*“Surely goodness and mercy  
will follow me all the days of my life;  
and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.”*

Isaac Watts got hold of the inner heart of these beautiful words. He pictured our eternal relationship with Christ as something intimate and familiar – as familiar as a child nestled securely into the family. Listen:

“The sure provision of my God attend me all my days;  
O may Your House be my abode, and all my work be praise.  
There would I find a settled rest, while others go and come;  
No more a stranger, or a guest, *but like a child at home.*”