

Your Bone and Flesh

Sixth Sunday after Pentecost

July 4, 2021 – [2 Samuel 5:1-5, 9-10](#) & [Mark 6:1-13](#)

Color: Green

INTRODUCTION

For the church in the USA, the Fourth of July is always problematic for worship teams. While not a religious holy day, there is an expectation from many that at least some recognition of the day is required. We don't disagree, but the question becomes one of mood as much as structure. How do we approach a celebration of nation in a moment dedicated to the worship of the God of all creation? The God to whom we consistently pledge our deepest, or highest allegiance? Some wrestling with this question would help the worship team approach the day with new perspectives and an appreciation for the complexity of the subject. And every nation has to struggle with the trend toward nationalism that can overwhelm our faith if we don't tread carefully.

Perhaps the twin disciplines of gratitude and confession would be helpful here. We can begin with the overwhelming sense of gratitude for the many blessings we have received, even as we acknowledge that we have not always been good stewards of the resources of this world. A proper sense of humility can help us avoid the excesses of nationalism.

Last year on this date, we discussed how the idea of "independence" isn't really a Christian concept. (Look here for that conversation:

<https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship-planning/for-freedom/fifth-sunday-after-pentecost-year-a-lectionary-planning-notes/fifth-sunday-after-pentecost-year-a-preaching-notes>.)

Our selected texts for this year help us grapple with independence versus relationship. The 2 Samuel text begins with a plea for a treaty based on familial ties. The Gospel text presents a reinterpretation of the concept of "home" as we considered shared mission and ideals. (See Preaching notes for more.) Perhaps this is an approach that will help the worship team design an experience that highlights common bonds and relationships of caring and service that lift up all people in a nation of high ideals. Perhaps an emphasis on the tapestry of diversity and creativity in our nation would open eyes to what truly ties us together as a

nation. Here, too, there is room for confession of how we have not always seen the other, particularly those who might not look like us outwardly, as our bone and flesh. We have dismissed those who are not like us as somehow less than we are.

Discipleship begins with relationship. With whom are we willing to be in relationship? Who is included in our understanding of bone and flesh? Who is “us” in a world of “us” and “them”? Worship on this day can be about drawing the circle as wide as possible – to acknowledge our common kinship through the Spirit. Let there be less of a nation of boasting and more of a nation striving to be the light on the hill, the shining example of the kin-dom of heaven on earth.

PREACHING NOTES

Our Hebrew scripture text begins with a plea to recognize kinship. The tribes of the northern kingdom of Israel come to David, newly established king of Judah, and ask to be included under his leadership and authority. They recognize a relationship; they acknowledge that David has long been the source of their strength and direction, even while Saul was still called their king. They want to be united as one nation, shepherded by David. So, they call on their kinship. “We are your bone and flesh,” they argue, how can you refuse to unite with us, to rule over us? We are family. We are home.

The other dynamic working in the 2 Samuel text is the establishment of place as home. Certainly, there is still a sense of the locus of the connecting tissue being a person, David. But there is now the introduction of the place, Jerusalem, as that which binds the family together. This is only the beginning, of course, as the temple and the home of God is yet to be built. But the city becomes, with the person of David, the magnet that draws the newly formed (or perhaps re-formed) covenantal family together. Jerusalem, like David, grew and became “greater and greater.” The city was built from “the Millo inward (v.9).” Other translations say from the “terraces inward.” Perhaps a better understanding would be the “ramparts.” These are the fortifications that surround the city—protection then settlement; walls and then living space. Home is a place of safety first and then comfort and sustenance. Come home to the security of this place we’ve built under God. Come home.

“Show me the way to go home.” Do you remember that scene from *Jaws*? They are out there on that boat; it is late, and they are waiting for the monster to come. And they start singing “Show me the way to go home.” Remember? “Show me the way to go home, I’m tired and I wanna go to bed. I had me a drink about an hour ago and it’s gone right to my head.” It is a silly moment in the midst of a great horror. But I wondered why that song. There are lots of other little ditties to take our minds off the troubles to come. So why that one?

Is it perhaps that it wasn’t a little distracting, nonsense ditty, but in fact was a real plea? The veteran shark hunter, the marine scientist, and the landlubber sheriff might have been giving words to what was in the back of their minds, “Get me out of here!” When things look bleak, when options run out, when enemies threaten, we want to go home. It is a natural impulse. Home is a place of safety, a place of peace.

There is a pull toward home in the best of situations, not to mention the worst. We are all like those birds who baffle scientists with their ability to find their way home. Or the salmon who swim upstream for miles to get to the spawning grounds – to get home. Show me the way to go home. Robert Frost said, “Home is the place where, when you have to go there, they have to take you in” (Frost, “The Death of the Hired Man”). Or do they? Jesus went home in our gospel text for this week. There did not seem to be much taking in going on there.

The Gospel text gives us two passages this week. Or maybe not. Maybe they are really about the same thing, but one is a failure and the other reaches the goal. Maybe.

Jesus goes home. Why he goes home, Mark doesn’t say. Mark isn’t given to reveal motivations and deliberations. He just says that Jesus went home. But we can imagine why Jesus went home because he is like us. So, he goes home for the same reasons we go home. He goes home because, well, because it’s home! He goes for comfort, he goes for identity’s sake; he goes because maybe he thinks that Robert Frost is right and that no matter what he has done to this point, they will take him in. Or maybe he is riding a bit of a high and wants to share it with those who know him best. The previous chapters have Jesus performing all sorts of incredible acts, and now he is going home to let them see how the local boy

has made good. Or maybe he is going home to try and heal what might have been broken by a misunderstanding.

Go back to chapter three in Mark's story. Jesus heals the man with the withered hand and gets in a fight with the authorities who wished he had waited a day to do this work! But the crowds loved him and came by the hundreds. Then Jesus took a teaching time out with his disciples, went up a mountain, and taught and prayed. But word got back home. And their conclusion was that Jesus was crazy. Carpenter kids from Nazareth don't go off and do such things. He's upsetting the powers that be and drawing attention to himself in all sorts of ways. He must be off his rocker. So, they went to bring him home.

When they got there and word got to Jesus that his mother and his brothers were waiting with one of those white coats with the sleeves too long, Jesus said, "Who is my mother? Who are my brothers?" That had to hurt. So, maybe in chapter six, Jesus goes home to explain what he really meant. Maybe he goes to heal the hurts of misunderstanding. Maybe he goes to give the family another chance to catch a larger vision of what family might mean, what family needs to mean to live in the world in which we live.

So, he tries again. And it works! For a moment or two anyway. He spoke in the synagogue, and they were astounded by him. For a moment. When they listened to his words, they were knocked out of themselves for a moment. They were swept up in his vision; they leaned into his promise. Until someone said, "Wait a minute. Isn't this that carpenter kid? Who does he think he is?" And everything fell apart. They turned away from him because they thought they knew him. They turned against him because they thought he should stay in his place. They called him names – "Son of Mary" instead of the usual "Bar Joseph," implying that his parentage was suspect. They laughed, they sneered, they ignored him. And even Jesus was amazed at the level of their disrespect.

Jesus went home, but home didn't take him in. My inclination in such a scenario would be to feel sorry for myself. Poor me, they don't understand me, the real me, the me I have become. They still see the goofy kid I was instead of the man I have become. I could have a real self-pity party if such a thing happened to me. Because there is within us the desire to go home. Or maybe better, there is within

us the desire to be home, to be welcomed home, to feel at home. And if home won't take you, what's left?

"He called the twelve and sent them out, two by two." What's left when you've left home, or home has left you? Make a new one. He sent them out to create a sense of community, build relationships, care for those they met, trust them, rely on them, make yourself at home with them. Jesus' vision of evangelism or of mission (and he never really separated those two, as far as I can tell) is not one of "winning souls" or of drive-by mission efforts. Instead, Jesus seems most interested in relationships. His work is done in the presence of relationships, and because they refused to enter into a relationship with him, "he could do no deed of power there."

Home is not so much a place as it is a level of relationship. It is a welcome. Robert Frost was right; they will take you in at home. But Jesus tells us that home is about a commitment to a vision of home he called the kingdom of God and a commitment to love one another with the same kind of love he pours out on us. In other words, he is trying to show us the way home.

On this holiday weekend, it seems to me that what we really celebrate is neither a historical happenstance nor the glories of a richly blessed nation. Instead, it is an ideal, a vision of what we could be, what we long to be. We who call the United States of America home love our country, but at the same time, we hope for more – more justice for all, more equality, more hospitality. We celebrate who we are, even as we celebrate who we might be. "We hold these truths to be self-evident." This is true of every nation, no doubt. We all want a country that feels like home, which means we need people, all the people - of the people, by the people, and for the people - to show us the way to go home. Show us the way to be home, a home for all God's children. For they are our bone and flesh.