

Home Plate Don't Move

A sermon preached by
James F. McIntire

Texts:
Luke 16:1-13

September 19, 2010
Homecoming Sunday

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Hope United Methodist Church
Eagle & Steel Roads, Havertown, PA
Phone: 610-446-3351
Web: www.HavHopeUMC.org
Office: HopeUMCHavertown@verizon.net
Pastor: HopeUMCPastor@verizon.net

Luke 16:1-13

Then Jesus said to the disciples, "There was a rich man who had a manager, and charges were brought to him that this man was squandering his property. 2 So he summoned him and said to him, "What is this that I hear about you? Give me an accounting of your management, because you cannot be my manager any longer.' 3 Then the manager said to himself, "What will I do, now that my master is taking the position away from me? I am not strong enough to dig, and I am ashamed to beg. 4 I have decided what to do so that, when I am dismissed as manager, people may welcome me into their homes.' 5 So, summoning his master's debtors one by one, he asked the first, "How much do you owe my master?' 6 He answered, "A hundred jugs of olive oil.' He said to him, "Take your bill, sit down quickly, and make it fifty.' 7 Then he asked another, "And how much do you owe?' He replied, "A hundred containers of wheat.' He said to him, "Take your bill and make it eighty.' 8 And his master commended the dishonest manager because he had acted shrewdly; for the children of this age are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than are the children of light. 9 And I tell you, make friends for yourselves by means of dishonest wealth so that when it is gone, they may welcome you into the eternal homes. 10 "Whoever is faithful in a very little is faithful also in much; and whoever is dishonest in a very little is dishonest also in much. 11 If then you have not been faithful with the dishonest wealth, who will entrust to you the true riches? 12 And if you have not been faithful with what belongs to another, who will give you what is your own? 13 No slave can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth."



Kathleen Norris is the author of a number of spiritual books like *The Cloister Walk* and *Amazing Grace* and one that I have just this week started reading, *Acedia* who found what she needed in life when she made her way home. Home, for Norris, is western Dakota where she now lives on the prairie in the house where her grandmother was born. In her book, *Dakota*, she writes of the adjustments to time and space and lifestyle that she had to make when she moved there from the hectic pace of northeastern United States.

She makes it a point to share with the reader the importance of the rhythm of the spiritual disciplines which have become a part of her life and turned her toward what is truly home – home for her heart. She has been touched deeply by time she spends with Benedictine brothers and sisters who have taught her about liturgy and meditation and liberation.

I loved reading *Dakota*. In one chapter as she writes of the paradox of living in monasteries which are full of, not people who have been formed into some mold that makes everyone the same, but rather filled with people who are free to be themselves, even to the point of being eccentric.

A monastery is cohesive; it is not a schismatic society that survives by expelling those who don't fit into a mold. The difference might be summed up in two versions of heaven I once heard from a Benedictine nun: in one, heaven is full of people you love, and in the other, heaven is where you love everyone who is there.

Where is your home? Is it that place which is full of everyone you love? Or is it that place, a place like your church, where you are supposed to love everyone who is there? I advocate for the latter – that the church is our home, despite whatever we might find there that we don't like very much. The church – this church – is a place full of people who we are called to love no matter who they are.

One of the things that happens, though, is that we get so far away from home that we forget how we got where we are and then we can't find our way back home.

E.B. White's classic book, *Stuart Little*, tells the story of the second son of Mr. and Mrs. Little, Stuart who is only 2 inches tall and "who looks remarkably like a mouse. And soon he acts like a mouse as well – wearing a gray hat and carrying a small cane." It was my favorite book as a child, I think because it was the first chapter book that I ever read. I re-read it recently because it was referenced in a novel which I read. Stuart's life is one big adventure as you can imagine it would be for anyone as small as a mouse.

He slips down into the bathroom sink drain to find his mom's lost ring. He captains a model sailboat in a race on a pond in Central Park. He befriends Margalo, a tiny, injured bird who the Littles take in while she is on the mend. Eventually he heads out on his biggest adventure to find Margalo after she flies away for fear of the neighborhood cats.

In the small town of Ames Crossing, Stuart encounters a telephone line man and asks him for direction.

"Which direction are you headed?," he asked.

"North," said Stuart.

"North is nice," said the repairman. "I've always enjoyed going north. Of course, south-west is a fine direction, too."

"Yes, I suppose it is," said Stuart, thoughtfully.

"And there's east," continued the repairman, "I once had an interesting experience on an easterly course. Do you want me to tell you about it?"

"No thanks," said Stuart.

"The repairman seemed disappointed, but he kept right on talking. 'There's something about north,' he said, 'something that sets it apart from all other directions. A person who is heading north is not making any mistake, in my opinion.'"

"That's the way I look at it," said Stuart, "I rather expect that from now on I shall be traveling north until the end of my days."

"Stuart rose from the ditch, climbed into his car, and started on the road that led toward the north. The sun was just coming up over the hills on his right. As he peered ahead into the great land that stretched before him, the way seemed long. But the sky was bright, and he somehow felt he was headed in the right direction."

Stuart was headed in the right direction, away from the Littles' home but toward home in a broader sense. He was headed toward life and all that life brings with it.

"Following a broken lie north, I have come upon some wonderful places," continued the repairman. "Swamps where cedars grow and turtles wait on logs but not for anything in particular; fields bordered by crooked fences broken by years of standing still, orchards so old they have forgotten where the farmhouse is. In the north I have eaten my lunch in pastures rank with ferns and junipers, all under fair skies with a wind blowing. My business has taken me into spruce woods on winter nights where the snow lay deep and soft, a perfect place for a carnival of rabbits. I have sat at peace on the freight platforms of railroad junctions in the north, in the warm hours and the warm smells. I know fresh lakes in the north, undisturbed except by fish and hawk and, of course, by the Telephone Company, which has to follow its nose. I know all these places well. They are a long way from here – don't forget that. **And a person who is looking for something doesn't travel very fast.**"

In so many ways this is the home that we all search for, that place where all seems well, where peace reigns, where nothing is undisturbed or out of place. “North” is that “right direction” for all of us, the road that will take us toward that which we long for whatever that might be for any one of us.

And Jesus’ message is consistently reminding us what exactly is the goal of us being headed in the right direction – headed home. We are headed toward God, God’s reign, God’s will, God’s direction. On the way toward that which is home for us we head not necessarily toward geographical north but certainly in the right direction. Yet along the way there are any numbers of things that can distract us and turn us away.

Not the least of these is the subject of the parable in today’s Gospel reading from Luke. “Whoever is faithful in a very little is faithful also in much;” says Jesus, “and whoever is dishonest in a very little is dishonest also in much. If then you have not been faithful with the dishonest wealth, who will entrust to you the true riches? ... No slave can serve two masters ... You cannot serve God and wealth.”

The metaphorical north for Jesus is that direction that takes you toward God – toward home – and away from the things that distract. And if we are truly seeking God, what better place to find God but in that comfortable home that the Stuart Little’s telephone repairman describes ... “fields bordered by crooked fences ... warm hours and warm smells” – that place where one can be at peace sitting on railroad freight platforms.

Welcome home. Welcome home to that place we call Hope. Home where God reigns and wealth is the enemy. Welcome home where there are no clear answers but lots of questions, where things don’t always seem as clear cut obvious as we might want them, a place which is “a long way from here” but yet a place where together we can get to as we journey forward.

“And don’t forget, a person looking for something doesn’t travel very fast.”

That “north,” that “home,” to which God leads us is that place where things might not be quite what we expect them to be, and most certainly not anything like what the world would have us see.

A friend sent me this story. Is it a contemporary parable in the spirit of Jesus' parable? An ice cream vendor got caught in a monumental traffic jam on a hot, humid afternoon. He finally got out of his truck, went to the back and got himself a cold ice cream bar. As he munched, he realized that in the car idling beside him four young children were watching his every bite. On impulse he once more opened the back of his delivery truck and got out ice cream for those children. Of course, in moments he was surrounded by a crowd of youngsters, as refugees from the other stalled vehicles mobbed him. By the time traffic began to move again, the ice cream man had given away four boxes of ice cream bars, which he had already decided to pay for himself. When he returned to the factory, he was called into the manager's office. But instead of being fired, the manager smiled and told him it was the best public relations they had received in years. Grateful parents had been calling in all afternoon to praise the kindness of the man who had changed a frustrating situation into a moment of delight.

So here we are this morning, back home again. We have come home to a place which is filled with all of the people we love or it's filled with people that we will have to *learn* to love. It's north, that metaphorical place where God is present and God's reign reigns. It is home, the place which welcomes each of us with open arms and embracing strength and compassionate kisses.

Home is that place which encompasses all that God has spoken to us about throughout the summer months – how in Jesus there is no longer separation into categories, no Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, man nor woman, about the woman with the lost coin, the bent-over woman touched by a healing Jesus, the good Samaritan, what to do with our full barns. This is our home which God fills

with not only stories and parables and metaphors but with people like you and me. This community of faith is home, and we have returned.

God's call to us to come home, to find home, to search until the journey gets you where God needs you seems to me a lot like what

I learned recently from a biography of, arguably, the greatest baseball player of all times, Satchel Page, that he once said what has become the title of my sermon this morning. When asked how he learned to be such a great pitcher, he said, "Just take the ball and throw it where you want to. Throw strikes. Home plate don't move."

Well, God don't move either. We step away. We take a side track occasionally (or often). We get distracted. We move and avoid and dance around it all. But God don't move.

And home don't move either. Home is right here waiting for us where God welcomes us. Like Kathleen Norris reminds us of what she learned from the Benedictine nun: in one image, "heaven [or we might say "home"] is full of people you love, and in the other [image], heaven [again, might we substitute "home"?] is where you love everyone who is there."

So this morning, receive God's welcome and welcome each other. Home is right here where it's always been. Home plate don't move. Home don't move. Welcome home. And try not to be distracted away from this home which might not be full of people you love but which is clearly that home where you are called to love everyone who is here.

Welcome home ...

Amen.