

SERMON- Proper 16 (B)
Charles R. Cowherd

1 Kings 8:~~1, 6, 10-11~~, 22-30, 41-43

Psalms 84

Ephesians 6:10-20

St. Timothy's (Herndon)
August 25, 2024

John 6:56-69

OPENING:

At some point over the course of Vacation Bible School earlier this month, I was asked by one of our young people, a 1st grader,

“Father Charles, do **you** own the church?”

Great question, a little odd given that we were making ice cream in the kitchen as he was asking it.

But I responded

“No **I** don't own the church.”

So then he asked “**who** owns the church?”

I was ready for it, by that point, I said: “We all do... You own a little bit of the church, and I own a little bit of the church, and your friend right here own a bit of the church and your parents own another bit of the church.”

He seemed satisfied with that answer but quickly added:

“Well I must own **a lot** of this church because I'm six and I have been going here **a long time.**”

“Welcome Home St. Timothy's”...

if you have been going here 40 years or 4 months.

If you are 80 something or 8 months old,

“Welcome Home” on this Welcome Home Sunday and Weekend.

A few days after that initial question,

I got the same question again, this time from my own son.

It must have been a popular topic at the VBS because he also asked:

“Dad, do you own the church?”

I thought he was talking about who is in **CHARGE** of the church, myself or Allyson Showalter, this is a really important concept in his psyche. And so I explained: “I am in charge of the upstairs and Allyson is charge of the downstairs.”

But that was not what was going on, so then he said:

“No, like who **built** the church?”

And I said “Well a lot of people did... Deke and Andy and John Jensen... they are always **working** on the church.... But God Bless 'em, they don't **own** it.”

I was worried at this point that I would have to explain to him and the whole VBS the concept of how we hold this property in “trust” for the Diocese and that people have tried to “own the church” and take it for themselves (not here but Episcopal churches close by) but that none of us technically “own” the church.

But I like my first answer: “we all own a little bit of it.” That’s true.

I should have added though, to this idea of “who owns the church?”

That: “It’s God’s really. God owns it. It’s not mine or the Vestry or the Diocese’s, or even the Church’s (capital C)... this is God’s home.”

“Welcome Home” to this little corner of Christendom, of God’s home, called St. Timothy’s Herndon.

GOSPEL:

Believe it or not, this question of being “home”, of “ownership,” of “belonging,” of “safety” is a part of what’s going on in our Gospel lesson.

Notice the little line in our reading that situates the story geographically, in Capernaum, the home of the disciples. Capernaum was a small fishing village on the Sea of Galilee, in the 20th century, archaeologists discovered, next to the synagogue, an octagon-shaped house, that is thought to be house of St. Peter.

That means, that the disciples, or at least Peter and Andrew, were hearing this difficult word about the bread and the wine and heaven, and they could literally see their house. They could leave and go home if they wanted, and some did.

But Jesus was inviting them to somewhere else, to God’s house, God’s home in God’s geography.

Jesus says: “I know that’s hard. Do you also wish to go away?”

and Peter... he nails this one. Peter, out of desperation or exaltation, says:

“Lord to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God.”

Peter had come “home”—with his actual home in spitting distance—through this powerful confession of faith.

Here's another way to think about it: when Jesus said all this, when he invited the disciples to: “Come home” there was nothing there. There was the synagogue, but his days were numbered there. There were no beautiful churches, no edifices of

stone or wood. No institutions, no 401k plan.

He had the gall to say “come with me, come home” when what he was welcoming them into was nothing BUT his body, his soon to be broken body. This bread and this wine that he said offered eternal life. Which beggars belief.

We continue that claim today, I invite you here back again to be rooted and grounded and to abide and to be nourished and nurtured by, merely, something that tastes... like bread and wine.

To be clear, *I* am not actually asking you to do what Jesus asked.

He wanted them to leave and never go back to their homes.

All throughout the Gospel narrative, he asks us to leave our homes, pretty forceful about that. With that, Jesus asks that rhetorically: “Does this offend you?” with a little “tut tut”—does it offend you that I am offering eternal life in exchange for following me? He does not MIND offending. I do.

But I am not Jesus.

So you can keep your home.

But, know this, “the Gospel with no offense is like a surgeon without a scalpel.”

SHIFT

Here is the Good News.

If you had been here for VBS, guess what? mission accomplished,

The kids feel at home, like they own the place.

Thanks to our wonderful parents and our gifted teachers and our remarkable children, we have 23 who did not wish to go away, who instead, like Peter, have come to believe and know something about what the Holy One of God looks like, and what a group following the Risen Christ looks like.

They know something like that, and they have hand motions to go along with it.

Speaking of adorable... Peter, in the Gospel narrative, he meets Jesus in Capernaum at the beginning, way before our story from today, and he is smitten. He says I will follow you Jesus but first Peter says: “Would you like to come back to my house?” If you ever have had a child ask if a new friend can come over, you know what it’s like.

It’s a remarkable thing: Peter, the future rock of the Church, the vicar of Christ, the Bishop of Rome, is so taken by Jesus that Peter... wants him to come over and play with his toys.

Jesus does, and it’s great, Jesus even heals Peter’s mother-in-law, which must have gotten huge points with Mrs. Peter. Peter must think he has it made, a new BF, his Mother-in-law no longer has arthritis, and it’s happening in the home that he owns.

But then Jesus breaks his heart. And says, your actual home is here with me. Travelling across Galilee, in a stormy boat, on a cliff, in people's houses, feeding and preaching and teaching. That's your home. Your home will be in the Garden, it will be on the cross, it will be on your cross. That will be your HOME. You have sympathy for Peter, he must have said: can we just go back to my house across the street and play in the basement.

CONCLUSION:

I will close by saying this, in Congregational Development studies, they have zeroed in **the one thing** that draws people to a particular church, that gets people to like a church, to maybe give it another try, and then finally to join a church.

(This is in addition to Music Formation Preaching: Jr. Warden's [Rick Wilson] *Holy Trinity* of what makes a good church.)

The thing that undergirds all those things, the thing that people answer on surveys and in conversations that gets them in. The **one big thing**:

"It felt like home.

St. _____ is home to me. I feel like I belong. Like I was meant to be there.

(Something like that)

I got the sense that this is where I could be at home."

If you could bottle, and sell THAT, the Church capital C would not be losing people left and right.

If we could turn on a switch and cue the Musak and the fireplace and cookies wafting in the air, we would be busting at the seams.

But you can't, it's indefinable, ineffable, without definition.

More than it's hard, because, again, it's a lesson and invitation, a homecoming that offends.

TO say I am going to go leave my home (whatever that means) and go worship the Crucified God Man who asks us to drink his blood and eat his body.

That is offensive. It was then, and is now.

I need to be reminded of that that "the Gospel with no offense is like a surgeon without a scalpel." But a scalpel heals, faith heals, Jesus the Good Physician and the

Good Shepherd heals as he calls us home.

AMEN