

II Samuel 5:1-6, 9-10
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What is your hometown? Does anyone ever ask you that? Where are you from? If someone were to ask you, what would you say? I was born in Boulder, Colorado, but I've also lived in Santa Barbara, California; Spokane, Washington; Princeton, New Jersey; Ashland, Kansas; and here in Michigan. Still, if people ask me what my home town is, I answer Boulder. Yet, I've lived *here* far longer than I lived in Boulder. So, does your hometown really mean the town in which you were *born*? Our two older children were born in Dodge City, Kansas, but they do not remember anything about Kansas. So, how can that be their hometown? Is your hometown the place where you grew up? Does it take memories to be a hometown? Is it the place that formed you—where you spent the so-called formative years? Does mark the beginning of you and your life?

I don't know if you've thought about it, but David and Jesus had the same hometown. They were both born in Bethlehem. Was that *their* hometown? Not really, because each of them is defined by their relationship with another town. Jesus grows up in Nazareth and through all through his lifetime he is called Jesus of Nazareth. David conquers the city of Jerusalem and renames it the City of David and it becomes his city for the rest of his life. Our passage today shows some of David's cleverness as a king. By the time we get to today's story, it is seven years after the death of Saul and Jonathan. David, because he was of the tribe of Judah, was proclaimed king over Judah, but the northern tribes wanted a descendant of Saul. When that didn't work out, they eventually came to David to implore him to be their king as well. It is here that he is anointed as king for the third time. You remember when we started this series on David that he was first anointed by Samuel when he was just a boy. Then seven years before today's passage he had been anointed by the tribe of Judah as their king, and now he is anointed as king over all Israel. David shrewdly takes the city of Jerusalem as his new capital because it had the advantage of being a city that did not belong to any of the tribes and sat on the border between the strong southern tribe of Judah and the united northern tribes. Jerusalem could be capital of the whole nation. It could be a city that belonged to everybody.

One wonders if our founding fathers had this in mind when they chose Washington DC as our capital. When President Washington was inaugurated in New York in 1789, it was agreed that the new nation would locate a capital that would be in none of the states and so Washington chose a spot on the Potomac that would take some land from Maryland and some from Virginia, thereby being close to the middle of the country, between North and South. Again, one that could belong to everybody. This is Independence Day, the celebration of the establishment of our country. But many lived here as colonists before it became the United States. Where did they think of as their home? The first generation of colonists clearly would have called Great Britain home, but what about their children who were born and raised here? Great Britain would have been some vague notion of an authority somewhere on the other side of the Atlantic but home, home was here where the children ran barefoot through fields, learned to fish, married and started their own generation of people to inhabit this land and call it home.

Some of you may remember the poet Robert Frost reading the poem “The Gift Outright” at John Kennedy’s inauguration.

The land was ours before we were the land's,
She was our land more than a hundred years
Before we were her people. She was ours
In Massachusetts, in Virginia,
But we were England’s, still colonials,
Possessing what we still were unpossessed by,
Possessed by what we now no more possessed.
Something we were withholding made us weak
Until we found out that it was ourselves
We were withholding from our land of living.¹

For this to be our home, we had to give ourselves to the land before we could really be Americans and really belong to this country. In a way that's what happens in Jerusalem. This is not just another city David conquers (there are lots of those) but this Jebusite city is changed into Israel's capital. But he

1 Frost, Robert. *The Poetry of Robert Frost*. Holt, Reinhart and Winston, 1969. p. 348.

himself to the city, he lives there, he brings the ark of the covenant there, he wants to build the Temple there.

So Jerusalem, not Bethlehem, is David's town. The city he conquered, built up, and lived in most of his life—is that what makes it his hometown? Maybe, but consider Jesus. He is also born in Bethlehem but as far as we know he never goes back there again. He is raised in the north, in Nazareth. We assume Mary and Joseph go back there while Jesus is still an infant. It is there that Joseph continues his work as a carpenter, and again as we assume from this text, he and Mary raise other children—James and Joses and Judas and Simon and at least a couple of girls. And Jesus is there for the first thirty years or so of his life. So is *this* his hometown? But Nazareth is a town that never really accepts him for who he is.

How many people do you know who will never go back to a high school reunion because high school was a terrible experience for them? Maybe high school was the place they were bullied or the place they did something embarrassing or shameful. Maybe high school was a place where they could not be themselves and so today they are afraid of coming back lest they be rejected. Maybe they've moved on to a different town where they are happier, more comfortable, more accepted. Even though they haven't lived there long, maybe they are making for themselves a *new* hometown.

Some may say it is the place where you lived the longest. Or some may say it marks the place where you've arrived, fulfilled your call, destiny, where you are finally who you want to be. Is that what a hometown is? A place you can be yourself? Is it the place where you can be your best self; where you can find what it is you were meant to do; where you can be the person God is calling you to be? If that's the case, then maybe David and Jesus did have the same hometown but it is not Bethlehem but Jerusalem. Because perhaps it is not the place that is so important but it is the people and how one is received there that is important. David is proclaimed king and in triumph makes Jerusalem his hometown. The Gospel of John says that Jesus came to his own and his own people received him not. That's what happens at Nazareth, but in Jerusalem he also is proclaimed as a king. Maybe Jerusalem is his hometown too because that's where the people receive him and welcome him. And it was there that

he gave himself to them and gave his life.

When Erin and I were married we had a reception at a beautiful manor overlooking the Hudson River in New York. We had been married in a Presbyterian Church in Suffern, New York, but it was not my home church, neither was it Erin's. We were moving out to Kansas, not my home state, neither was it Erin's. So I think it was only appropriate that when we chose a song for our first dance it was a song by Billy Joel called "You're My Home." "Wherever we're together, that's my home," the song says. "Home is just another word for you." Maybe it is not the place, it is the people, and what happens when we are with them. Home is not just the place we were born, or where we were raised, or where we live now, but where we give our best selves to those we love.

Is that what *this* place is? We name this as our church home not because of the building but what the building holds, the people, the memories we have, the place where you are recognized. It's not *where*, it's *who*. Over the last year and a half, we've discovered that it is not really just about a place, but it's about an experience, whether we are here or virtual. At its best, that's what the church can be—a home to the stranger, a rest for the sojourner, an experience of acceptance and love, when you feel nurtured and your best self can come out, a place and a people to whom we give ourselves. Isn't that what we try to do?

Communion. Isn't that what happens at this table? Home is the place where you are made welcome and it is here that Jesus gives himself to us. We are invited to this table by Jesus, this table where everyone has a place, not just us in this building, and not just all those Presbyterians around this country, but also those children of God around the world and also that great cloud of witnesses who have gone before us. That's why in the Great Prayer of Thanksgiving we talk about that coming day when we will all sit down at table in the kingdom of God and feast with all the saints. Because this table is a symbol of home, it is not only a reenactment of what Jesus did with his disciples, but it is an anticipation of what will be when we all are at home together. It is a foretaste of what is to come. At its best, that's what we should be too, a foretaste of the home that God intends for all of us—welcoming, inclusive, loving, empowering, where we are then sent to give ourselves to others. Where is your home? How about at this table with Jesus, with us, with all of us?