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Sermon preached by the Rev. Dr. Joseph S. Pagano on The Fifth Sunday of Easter, May 22, 2011

What is a home? When you think of the word or image or idea of a home, What comes to mind? Perhaps you think of a building, made with wood and plaster, or brick and mortar. Perhaps you think of home as a shelter from the storm, a place of refuge. Perhaps when you hear the word home, you think more of the hopes and dreams of the people who inhabit a home. A place where people build and share a life together. A place where husbands and wives and families share the hopes and hurts, and the joys and sorrows of life. Perhaps when you hear the word home you think of a place of solace and comfort. A place where you feel safe and whole. What do you think of when you hear the word home?

Some say, home is where the heart is. Others say, home is where you hang your hat. Robert Frost once wrote, "Home is the place, where when you have to go there, they have to take you in."

Somehow, someway, home has a special place in the human heart. It seems as though we are all longing for a place to call home. Many of you probably know the traditional folk song entitled "I want to go home." I'm familiar with the version by Van Morrison, so I always hear the lyrics in his growly voice singing "I want to go home. I feel so broke up, Lord, that I want to go home." This is a song for every human heart. Whenever we feel lonely or abandoned, we want to go home. Whenever we are filled with doubt or despair, we want to go home. Whenever we feel cut loose or lost, we want to go home. *Lord, sometimes I feel so broke up, that I want to go home.*

To feel at home. It's a lovely phrase. It also expresses the deepest longings of the human heart. St. Augustine gave famous expression to this longing when he wrote of God, "you have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in thee." *Lord, you have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in thee.* Somehow our restless hearts are always looking for a place to rest, a place to find true and abiding peace, a place to call home. Maybe we feel like if we only had the perfect job in the perfect community, then finally we wouldn't feel so restless. Maybe we feel like if we could meet that perfect someone, that perfect spouse or partner, then finally we would be ready to settle down. Maybe we feel like if we can just get the kids through high school then, finally we can rest.

And yet, and yet, even when we land our dream job, and find our soul mate, and raise our children, somehow the human heart is still restless, still looking for a place to find true and

genuine peace. Somehow, we are all still longing for a place to truly call our home. *Lord, you have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in thee. Lord, sometimes I feel so broke up, that I want to go home.* It seems like so much of our human experience can be summed up in these two phrases. In the good times and the bad times, we are all longing for a place called home.

In our Gospel lesson for today, we hear words that speak directly to the longing of the human heart for a home. Jesus says, “Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father’s house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go to prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may also be.” This comes from a section of John’s Gospel called Jesus’ “Farewell Address.” In it, Jesus is preparing his disciples for the time when he will no longer be with them in the flesh. They must have been brokenhearted. But Jesus assures them that even though their relationship is changing, it is not ending. Even though he will no longer be with them in the flesh, they will remain connected. Jesus is going to prepare a place for them in his Father’s house, where they will remain united to him forever, “so that where I am, there you may be also.” Our true home is with God, and Jesus, who comes from their very bosom of God, is preparing a place for his disciples in God’s home, in God’s heart. Our true home, ultimately, is not a place, but a relationship, a relationship in the very heart of God, made possible by Christ, eternal in the heavens. *Lord, you have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in thee.*

Here’s the surprise. Even though the fullness of this relationship remains in our future, even now we can know the reality of this relationship; even now we can experience a foretaste of this eternal home. When we do the works that Christ’s commands us to do, when we love one another as Christ loved us and gave himself for us, then God’s love will dwell in us, then God’s love will make a home in us. When the brokenhearted are comforted, then God will make a home with us. When people lay down their lives for one another, then God will make a home with us. When all of God’s children are invited to God’s table to share in his body and blood, then God will make a home with us.

In her memoir, *Traveling Mercies*, Anne Lamott writes about why she stays so close to her church. She says, “I think we missed church ten times in twelve years. Sam would be snuggled in people’s arms in the earlier shots, shyly trying to wriggle free of hugs in the later ones.” She tells of their pastor Veronica who sings to them from the pulpit and who tells them stories of when she was a child. In one story she tells about a time when she was seven years old and her best friend got lost. “The little girl ran up and down the streets of the big town where they lived, but she couldn’t find a single landmark. She was frightened. Finally a policeman stopped to help her. He put her in the passenger seat of his car, and they drove around until she finally saw her church. She pointed it out to the policeman, and then she told him firmly, “You can let me out now. This is my church, and I can always find my way home from here.”

Lamott writes, “And that is why I have stayed so close to mine – because no matter how bad I am feeling, how lost or lonely or frightened, when I see the faces of the people at my church, when I hear their tawny voices, I can always find my way home.”

Lord, sometimes I feel so broke up, that I want to go home. Lord, you have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in thee.