

COMING HOME TO UUCWI
Rev. Kit Ketcham, Sept. 06

Sing with me, the words you'll find in your O/S.

O give us a home where the coyotes roam,
Where the deer and the cottontails play.
Where often is heard the sweet trill of a bird
And eagles in treetops do sway.

Home, home in the trees,
Where UUs feel just fine on their knees,
Where we're closer to God
And it does not feel odd
To be worshipping here by the sea.

I wrote these words while avoiding writing this homily this past week, thinking about how easily we UUs find a sense of the divine in our natural surroundings, particularly among the trees, as we are today, whether we are theists or not, whether we are comfortable with God language or not, whether we even think about spiritual matters.

Today we come back together after a summer of rest and relaxation, worry and tumult, sickness and health, boredom and excitement. And when we come together as a community, we inevitably must consider what it means to us to return to this place, this home, this spot where we will build our permanent home.

As we begin our new church year together, ripe with the promise of building that new home, I invite us to think of what "home" means to us as individuals and as a faith community.

First, for you personally, what does "home" mean to you? If you as a human being had no home, what would you feel you lacked? What would you feel you needed? (cong. response)

Then, for us as a community, what does “home” mean? We as a community have been without a permanent home since our birth 12 years ago. What does “home” mean to us, as a faith community?

So what possibilities does “home” imply to an individual? What possibilities does “home” imply to a faith community?

Some of us worry that by building our own home, we are being self-indulgent and wasting our resources rather than sharing them. This is an important question to ask ourselves. Why do we want a home of our own? Is it a selfish desire? A self-serving motive, to build a monument to our own accomplishments? Think about it. (pause)

I have done a lot of thinking about this and I know why I want a home for myself. I know what it’s like to feel rootless, temporary, ungrounded. Having known a number of truly homeless people and having visited with them in tents and cardboard boxes and makeshift shelters, I have a sense of what it feels like for an individual to be without a home. It’s scary, insecure, humiliating. (pause)

I want a home for myself so that I can have a base camp, a place from which to reach out to friends and family, to experience solitude and peace, to be creative, to offer my skills in places where they are needed.

And I know why I want a home for this congregation as well. It’s not just because it’s hard to feel at home in rented space, where others’ symbols are prevalent and ours must come down weekly. It’s not just because there’s a sense of never quite belonging in the space or being able to use it freely. It’s not just because the Lutherans get prime time and we have to meet at 4 o’clock.

It's not just because we have to ask permission every time we want to use it, because it doesn't belong to us. It's not just because we can't serve the kinds of refreshments we would like when we have guests.

No, the reason I want a home for this congregation is much more important than any of these. It's the whole reason why this faith community exists in the first place. It's the reason why folks from other UU congregations across the nation, from Washington, Oregon, Colorado, Georgia, the Midwest, California, the British Isles, Alaska, the East Coast, Canada, and places I've forgotten, have worked now for years to lay the groundwork so that we in this congregation can have a home to come home to.

What is that reason? Why has all this taken place?

It's happened because we UUs know we have an incredible, life-saving message to offer to this Whidbey community, a message for families and children and retirees and baby boomers and Gen X and Yers. We have a faith that reaches out to encompass all those who need a message of hope and reason and love. And in these perilous times, who doesn't need such a message?

We offer this message to people who have never felt at home at church. We offer this message to people who have been rejected by another religious tradition. We offer this message to people who can't swallow illogical dogmas. We offer this message to parents in search of a church where teachings are not about doctrine but about human living. We offer it to people looking for friends of like mind. We offer it to all who want a faith that is based on reason and tolerance and justice.

A home of our own is not a castle, a monument, but rather a tool, an instrument to be used to offer our life-saving message to the larger world. It gives us a foundation to stand on, to reach out a helping hand in the community. It gives us room to offer hospitality to others, a place from which to stage our missions of mercy. It gives us room to expand well beyond what we have today. It gives us a place to educate our children and ourselves, and, perhaps the community of Whidbey Island.

I was talking with my colleague Pastor Jim Lindus of Trinity a couple of weeks ago after taking a tour of their wonderful main facility and he mentioned that at the time they undertook this project, some folks in his congregation were very uneasy about expanding Trinity in such an huge way, undertaking a large financial obligation and the risks implied.

Several folks felt that it would be better to use the money to be spent on the building for charitable causes.

At that time, Trinity was housed in the space we normally use on Sundays. It was a small congregation of under 100 people, with limited programming, limited resources, and limited ability to give to the community.

Because of its courage and its willingness to take a risk in order to be of greater service to the community, Trinity Lutheran Church now has over 500 members---the largest Lutheran church in Washington State--- and has an active vibrant community outreach. Trinity serves many, if not most, of the community groups on the island, simply by offering the use of its building. This is a ministry far beyond what they could offer with their small facility and their small membership.

So when I ask you “what does ‘home’ mean to you”?, I’m also asking you “what does our home mean to this community, to this island?”

My favorite lines in the reading Dave offered us are these (and thanks to Don Wollett, who gave me a copy of this reading):

“The concept of home is perhaps more poignant because of the extraordinary mobility of the American people. From the beginning, we have been a nation constantly moving...The concept of home has a particular resonance for a nation of immigrants, all of whom left one home to seek another.”

We have all left one home to seek another. Over and over, we have created homes for ourselves and our families, often in places too small, too limiting, too far away, perhaps lonely, sometimes scared, always hoping to be “at home” somewhere someday.

In our spiritual lives as well, many of us have left one home to seek another. In UUCWI, we hope to find our spiritual home. We are tired of roaming, tired of the search, ready to settle down, put down our spiritual roots, and begin to flourish as we know we can. We are grateful to our former hosts, the several groups and organizations who have rented us space over the years, but we are no longer content to be renters, having to conform to others’ homes.

We want to have a home of our own and we are getting ready to build it with every dollar we contribute to the building fund, every work party we attend, every pledge we make, every conversation we hold about how and when and why and where and who and what’s next in our lives together as a community.

This is a terrifically exciting and productive time in our life together. We are getting ready to launch a new endeavor, a new effort to reach out to our neighbors and friends here on the island and beyond. We are creating a home where all are welcome, all are loved, all are asked to contribute to the betterment of this community and of this world.

And we are going to create it together. What do you say? Are you ready?

Please join Dave and me in our closing reading, which you will find in your order of service. I will read the plain text with this side and Dave will read the italicized text with the other side.

READING #733

Our closing hymn is also in your order of service: “May Nothing Evil Cross this Door”.

BENEDICTION

Our worship service, our time of shaping worth together, has ended but our service to the world begins again as we leave this place. Let us go in peace, remembering that home is not just a place, it is also where our hearts reside. May we build together our spiritual home in this shady woods but also prepare the rooms of our hearts to welcome those who come looking for what we have to offer in these perilous times.

Amen, Shalom, Salaam, and Blessed Be.