

# *No Place Like Home*

A Sermon Delivered on March 10, 2019  
by  
The Reverend Axel H. Gehrmann

*“The ache for home lives in all of us,  
the safe place we can go as we are...”*

*-- Maya Angelou*

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**Meditation:** by the neo-pagan activist and feminist author Starhawk.

We are all longing to go home to some place  
We have never been – a place, half-remembered, and half-envisioned  
We can only catch glimpses of from time to time.  
Community.  
Somewhere, there are people to whom we can speak with passion  
Without having the words catch in our throats.  
Somewhere a circle of hands  
Will open to receive us, eyes will light up as we enter, voices will celebrate with us  
whenever we come into our own power.  
Community means strength  
That joins our strength to do the work that needs to be done.  
Arms to hold us when we falter.  
A circle of healing.  
A circle of friends.  
Someplace where we can be free.

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Last September Elaine and I moved from Pacific Grove to Seaside. We found a little house for rent just up the street from Seaside city hall that we liked a lot. 683 square feet. Cozy. It has a nice yard, lots of windows, and a small garage big enough for all our boxes of accumulated stuff.

It took a while for us to settle in and figure out what to put where. But I think we are there now. We found a place for all our furniture, our clothes and our dishes. And maybe most important of all, we found places on our walls to hang our favorite pictures and posters and pieces of art. Now it looks like our place, we know our neighbors, and it feels like home.

But I still have a vivid memory of how unsettled I felt while we were looking for a place to live, and uncertain whether we would find one, whether we would have a home.

Unlike Steve in his college days (who shared his experience this morning), and some others of you who have experienced homelessness, Elaine and I moved smoothly from one home to another. What remains with me is deepened sense of gratitude for the home we have.

\* \* \*

Homelessness is a serious problem that has touched many of us in various ways. And this church has been supporting the I-HELP program (Interfaith Homeless Emergency Lodging Program) for quite a while now. Bob and Steve and Sue Ellen have been actively involved, but so have many others. Karen Araujo, Lorita Fisher, Wanda Sue Parrott and Lee Hulquist leap to mind... and many more of you have pitched in, providing a meal, a helping hand, or a friendly face.

It all began in the early 1990s, when a number of local churches wanted to do something to help the homeless folks in the area. There were no established shelters at the time, and no single church had the resources to build one. But several congregations did feel they could make their church buildings available for a night or two every month. Fred and Marge Keip were ministers here at the time, and they were early strong supporters of the program.

For the past 25 years, I-HELP has been providing short-term lodging and evening meals to homeless men and women, as well as support and advice in finding jobs, and helping program participants maintain a positive outlook and a lifestyle that fosters personal growth and autonomy.

But homelessness continues to be a big problem. Just this week the Monterey Herald reported that Monterey County is in a huge crisis. There is a dramatic rise in family homelessness along the coast and rural areas, which continues to grow each day. Last week the Monterey Peninsula Unified School District hosted a panel that focused on homeless youth. A new report shows that one out of ten students enrolled in Monterey County schools are homeless.

These are tough economic times for millions of Americans. The US Census Bureau says over 40 million women and men live in poverty, and many of them are essentially an illness, an accident or a paycheck away from living on the streets.

It is hard for many of us to imagine....

In her book *Homeless in America*, Anna Kosof writes:

“What does it really feel like to be without a home? No one who is fortunate enough to have a home can truly imagine what it is like to be without one. It is the most precious thing that we can have..., a place we can lock and where we keep our material possessions and special belongings, a place to go home to. Home is a place we take for granted, while hundreds of thousands of people across the country go to sleep on the sidewalks, in public rest rooms, in bus depots, in makeshift homes on highways, in church basements temporarily turned into shelters, and in public shelters that house over a thousand people, offering nothing more than a sea of beds placed next to each other. The homeless have no permanent beds, few clothes, and no kitchens in which to prepare their food. The children have few toys. Most of all, they have no place to call their own...

From the very beginning of time, people have waged war for food and shelter. In the most primitive societies, [we] have struggled to meet these most basic human

needs. It is astonishing that in the [twenty-first] century, we are still struggling to meet these needs.” (p. 15)

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What is a home? It is a place of shelter. A place to put our possessions. A safe place to sleep. It is a roof over our heads. Any building, any apartment, any house can be a shelter. But a home more than that. Home is something else.

Scott Russell Sanders writes:

“The word *house* [comes] from an Indo-European root meaning to cover or conceal. I hear in that etymology furtive, queasy undertones. Conceal from what? From storms? beasts? enemies? from the eye of God? *Home* comes from a different root meaning “the place where one lies.” That sounds less fearful to me. A weak, slow clawless animal, without fur or fangs, [- a human -] can risk lying down and closing its eyes only where it feels utterly secure. Since the universe is going to kill us, in the short run or the long, no wonder we crave a place to lie in safety, a place to conceive our young and raise them, a place to shut our eyes without shivering or dread...

However leaky or firm, whether tar paper or brick, the shell of a house gives only shelter; a home gives sanctuary...

The longing for a safe place to lie down echoes through our holy songs and scriptures. Abused and scorned, we look over Jordan, and what do we see? A band of angels coming for to carry us home.” (*Staying Put - Making a Home in a Restless World*, p.29, p. 30, p. 32)

So what is home? Is home a place where angels tread, like heaven, heaven on earth?

In his book *The Longing for Home* Frederick Buechner writes:

“*Home sweet home. There’s no place like home. Home is where you hang your hat...* What the word *home* brings to mind before anything else, I believe, is a place, and... not just a place where you happen to be living at the time... The word *home* summons up a place... which you have rich and complex feelings about, ...a place where you feel you belong and which in some sense belongs to you, a place where you feel that all is somehow ultimately well even if things aren’t going all that well at any given moment. To think about home eventually leads you to think back to your childhood home, the place where your life started, the place which off and on throughout your life you keep going back to if only in dreams and memories and which is apt to determine the kind of place, perhaps a place inside yourself, that you spend the rest of your life searching for even if you are not aware that you are searching. I suspect that those [of us] who as children never had such a place in actuality had instead some kind of dream of such a home...” (p. 7)

Is home a memory of the past, or a dream of the future? Or is it something in between?

In her book *House as a Mirror of Self: exploring the deeper meaning of home*, the British born architect Clare Cooper Marcus writes:

“Home is not only a literal place but also a place of deep contentment in the innermost temple of the soul. *Home is where the heart is* runs the familiar saying. It has, I think, two levels of meaning. Heart or love is our connection to family and friends, to places and persons familiar and nurturing. But heart is also our innermost being, our soul. In this latter sense, *home is where the heart is* refers to that way of being, that place, that activity in which we are most fully and most deeply ourselves...” (p. 280)

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Perhaps the greatest tragedy of homelessness is that without a home it is so much more difficult to be fully and deeply ourselves. We need a safe place where we can let down our guard, where we can take off our protective mask and be seen as who we truly are. A place where we will be accepted and respected – with all our frailties and imperfections, our strengths and our weaknesses, our doubts and our convictions, our shortcomings and our unique gifts.

You know, we sometimes call this place our “church home.” And I think it *is* a home for many of us. Many of us have been on a life-long religious journey in search of a place like this: a place where we are accepted just as we are. A place that embraces the beautiful complexity of life, the good and the bad, the joyful and the sad. A place that recognizes our human wholeness, that celebrates the circuitous journey each of us has traveled to bring us here, and supports us in our efforts going forward to be better people – to be more loving and kind, more courageous and committed to serve a greater good.

A real home is a wonderful, precious place. A place of connection with family and friends. A place of connection to our own hearts, a temple of the soul.

I think this church really is a home for some of us. And what I like best about it, is that it aspires to be a home for *all* of us – a place where anyone who enters our doors will feel welcome. A place where everyone is accepted and respected.

If this is our “church home” then we are all called to be homemakers. We are all called to help keep this place in order and take care of one another. We are all called to make this the remarkable loving place we long for – a place half-remembered and half-envisioned – a place we may only catch glimpses of from time to time.

May this be a place, where our eyes light up, as we receive all who enter here,  
May this be a place where the circle of our hands holds anyone who falters.  
May this be a place where we join our strength together,  
and help create a world where everyone is at home.

Amen.

## Sources

Frederick Buechner. *The Longing for Home: Recollections and Reflections*. New York: HarperCollins, 1996.

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