

"In Search for Home"

By Rev. Edgar F. Solís

Introduction:

After two weeks of vacation, I came back home. However, I feel like when I was with family in my original country, I was also at home. Strangely I could experience this sense of brotherhood that connects me with people in different places and contexts.

Home then is not a physical place with all my material belongings. More than that, home is where I feel welcomed and appreciated. Home is the place where we feel safe.

(Slide 1) All this reminds me of Yoshi. Some years ago, we had a doggie, and like all dogs, Yoshi likes walks, so during the day, he took at least three walks. That happened when we lived in Muscatine, Iowa, some years ago.

I also remember that Yoshi liked to run away from home.

As you may imagine, all of us at home used to run after him to bring him back home. He did that on several occasions. He used to go to smell some trees, as every dog did his thing.

He used to go to say hello to his dog friends in the neighborhood, chasing some three or four squirrels, and then he came back home safe.

Still, one day everything was different.

He ran away, and we ran after him, but he ran so fast that he escaped from our sight. We were concerned about our doggie. Still, we waited to see if Yoshi would return home.

One, two, three hours, and nothing. Later, I went to my office, as our doggie delayed his return.

Suddenly, that night, I received a call from home. Yoshi had returned, but he was severely injured in one of his front legs.

We tried to reach a vet, but at night it was almost impossible.

Finally, we took Yoshi to the hospital, where the doctor and nurses did their best to save Yoshi's leg.

Now, during the medical procedure, the doctor asked me how it happened.

I answered, "Well, the doggie just ran away from home, then he came back in that condition. We don't know exactly what happened."

Then I said, "Doctor, what intrigues me is how Yoshi came back home. He probably got lost, and he got injured, and even with all of that he came back home"

The doctor's answer left me more than perplexed.

He said, "And do not we do the same? When we are in need or get injured, or something hard happens to us, we only want to be at home."

Bible Context:

In this passage, Jesus "sets his face to go to Jerusalem" — an idiom that signals his intent and determination.

According to Luke, Jesus' destination isn't only the cross or even the cross-and-resurrection.

It's also, and especially, Jesus' ascension — His being "taken up".

But before that, Jesus wanted to spend some time in Samaria.

Christian author Matthew Meyer says that denying hospitality to a traveler was widely considered a serious insult in the ancient world.

(Slide 2) Why don't the Samaritans receive Jesus and his entourage?

"Because," Luke says, "his face was set toward Jerusalem".

Let's remember: Samaritans were the descendants of Jews and Assyrian occupiers, and they disagreed with Jews about the preeminent place to worship God.

For Samaritans, it was Mount Gerizim. For Jews, it was Jerusalem.

As Luke tells it, the fact that Jesus was bound for Jerusalem is what made him unwelcome from the Samaritan point of view.

No sooner has Jesus "set his face" toward Jerusalem than he's rejected for that very reason — a clear case of what today we'd call, "religious intolerance."

Not to be outdone, Jesus' disciples respond in kind, furiously asking Jesus if they should call on God to rain down fire and destroy the Samaritans

"Religious intolerance," indeed!

Jesus immediately rebukes them — and in the Good Samaritan parable he tells shortly thereafter (Luke 10:25-37), he completes this rebuke with a devastating reversal: *So far from destroying your neighbors who believe differently than you do, you should be humble enough to learn from them, and follow their lead!*

Theological Reflection:

We are living in times of great need, and people out there are looking for connection and meaningful relationships.

One of the essential critiques that unchurch people have about organized churches is that faith communities are designed for people that have to fulfill specific religious criteria.

If you want to belong to a particular church, you must do this or believe in such or such doctrine. You must wear certain clothes, you must to speak this language, or you need to belong to a specific cultural context. You need to look like us, or you need to stop being who you are to belong to this home.

I am ashamed to confess something about the Church youth ministry I belong to when I was a teenager.

On several occasions, we discriminated against people because of their economic condition and religious background.

I belonged to an upper-middle-class church.

As a young and immature person, I remember that on several occasions when we received people from the margins, we asked them to go to a different church, just because they were poor or belonged to another religious denomination.

God has forgiven me for all that classist attitude and horrible sin.

Later, I paid my debt serving in missions where I could share the good news and help people with different religious backgrounds and the poor in our city.

Through the work of the Holy Spirit in my life, I understood that there are people searching for a home – searching for their souls.

Application:

What is genuine discipleship?

Right out of the block, Jesus warns against intolerance.

We may be tempted to destroy, or merely defeat, demean, or otherwise dismiss, people of other religions, convictions, opinions, or ways of looking at the world.

But when we do, we effectively turn away from Jesus.

(Slide 3) On the contrary, Jesus calls us not only toward tolerance and harmony, but toward a humble, generous affirmation of people who belong to other religions or no religion at all.

Even to the point of learning from non-Christians about how to be a better Christian.

This is precisely what Jesus urges us to do with the Good Samaritan parable.

It has become quite conventional these days to look down on our adversaries – political, religious, and otherwise.

But Jesus invites us to reflect that we all belong to God's creation in searching for a home.

Let's create a home for everyone here in Des Moines First United Methodist Church!

How?

How can we create a place that welcomes everyone in our community?

Out there are many searching for a faith community to belong to! How can we let them know that they are entirely welcome here!

Remember: The way home is not about going to a place. It is about the relationships that make it home.

The real story I shared with you about our doggie is a vital lesson that is good to receive.

We can learn about the love and compassion we have for God and how desperate humans are to return home – to return to God.

Like many of us, people out there are broken and severely injured. When we reject people because of their religion, politics, culture, race, or sexual orientation, we run away from God.

Still, it is time to return home.

May we all express the same love and the same compassion that Jesus thought and demonstrated to all people.

Amen!

