

What Will Home Look Like?



FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

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I wonder what Paul thought when Lydia asked him to stay at her home. We're sure she was an entrepreneur. She was probably well-off. Our clue is the reference to purple cloth. Rich people bought purple.

It would be easy to overlook what a breakthrough moment this is. The Way--Christianity, reaches Europe. Paul and other followers of Jesus had shared the Good News till this moment only in Asia. What prompted the breakthrough? Verses before this passage tell us Paul saw a vision, a man saying, "Come and help us out in Macedonia." After bad-weather boat rides, staying briefly on beautiful islands, Paul reaches the great city of Philippi Philip's city, Rome's glory. There is no synagogue. How will he meet people? He goes down in the river to pray. Faithful Jews in a city without a meeting place gather to pray at the river.

Surprise! There is no rabbi, no male leader. Lydia leads worship.

Lydia and worshipers listen deeply to Paul describe God's self-giving love given through Jesus Christ, Good News for all people. Then she commands him: "Come and make your home with me." What will home look like?

That's a question that a child in our family asked. Moving, his parents tried to get him excited about the new place they were going to live. He had only one question: "What will home look like?"

The book we call Revelation gives us a different picture of what home will look like. A few years after Paul's first trip to Europe, Christians were overwhelmed with opposition. The writer of Revelation is arrested, forced to live on a desert island. His has to write to the people he left behind, and does he write! He uses code language to protect them from Roman officials who were also sure to read his words. The striking images encourage the faithful: Home will look like this:

Rev. 21:1-5

- Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth;
for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away...
²And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God.
³...And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying,
'See, the home of God is among mortals. God will dwell with them;
they will be God's own peoples, and God will be with them;
⁴ God will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more...
for the first things have passed away.'
⁵ And the one who was seated on the throne said, 'See, I am making all things new.'

What will this new home look like? Revelation 22:1-5's images go deep:

- Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal,
flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb
²through the middle of the street of the city. On either side of the river is the tree of life... and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.
³Nothing accursed will be found there any more. But the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and God's servants will worship;
⁴~~They will see God's face~~, and God's name will be on their fore heads.
⁵And there will be no more night; they need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever.

At first glance these words may confuse you. Driving with my cousin I saw a building, concrete block, painted orange, The signs

said “Paradise Bar and Grill.” We said to each other, “Funny, that’s not quite what I thought Paradise would look like!”

There’s much more in this passage than a pretty picture of Paradise. Revelation tells us God lives with us: not individually, but in Community. Home, in the end time, Heaven itself is:

a community; a place of healing; and a place of we see God’s face.

In the face of violent oppression, slaves created songs and sang them

Swing low, sweet chariot, coming for to carry me home

Deep River, my home is over Jordan

Sometimes I feel like a motherless child a long, long way from home

What will home look like? Community, Healing, Vision.

Persian Muslim mystic Rumi wrote a beautiful poem, Are you wounded?

Your Wound is Where the Light Enters You.

Jesus makes it clear that we don’t have to wait until the end of time to be at home. There is a third kind of home. It happens right now.

Jesus answered him, “Those who love me will keep my word, and our Abba God will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them.”

What does he mean, “keep my word”? Previous verses make it clear: the one new commandment is to “Love one another as I love you.”

In other words, God is at home with us when we love God and others.

So it is we can be home for each other.

This brings us to the Spiritual Gift of “hanging out.” The Rev. Molly Vetter, a pastor in her 30’s has introduced me to a blogger who writes under the bloc name “Sarcastic Lutheran.” The blogger is heavily tattooed.

She tells her congregation of all generations that she loves yoga, “You know what, when your mother dies, your yoga instructor will not bring you a casserole. You need church!”

Jesus’ words on the night before his death give us a way to “be church.” What does home look like in the here and now? Jesus did a lot of hanging out. Younger generations know that intuitively.

Shane Claiborne: “It can be very fashionable to talk about peace, war, justice, but not very fashionable to work with people who have felt the hate, violence, injustice. Change the world, but also hang out with real people.”

Jesus answered, “Those who love me will keep my word, and our Abba God will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them.”

We get to respond hear and now to the question What will home look like? How can we be safe space for each other? How can we be love?

How are you “home” for others? How are your transcending your own self-imposed barriers? God is here, making a home with us. Now.

I’ve love the joke about people in heaven. Angels usher new arrivals past rooms with closed doors, saying “please don’t make any noise. Those people in that room think they are the only ones up here!”

I’m overwhelmed with similarities of stories from people who’ve had the opportunity to be in that zone between this life and hereafter. Almost all say, “So much I worry about didn’t matter. All the barriers, all the divisions aren’t there.”

Shall we gather at the river? Lydia is there. Paul is too. So are your loved ones. So are your worst enemies. The old has passed away.

Yes we’ll gather at the river, the beautiful river... with the saints...
that flows from the love of God!

FIRST SCRIPTURE ACTS 16:12-15

...[we sailed] to Philippi, which is a leading city of the district of Macedonia and a Roman colony. We remained in this city for some days.

¹³ On the Sabbath day we went outside the gate by the river, where we supposed there was a place of prayer; and we sat down and spoke to the women who had gathered there.

¹⁴ A certain woman named Lydia, a worshiper of God, was listening to us; she was from the City of Thyatira and a dealer in purple cloth. The Lord opened her heart to listen eagerly to what was said by Paul.

¹⁵ When she and her household were baptized, she urged us saying, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come and stay at my home."

And she prevailed upon us.

SECOND SCRIPTURE REVELATION 22:1-5

Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb

²through the middle of the street of the city. On either side of the river is the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, producing its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.

³Nothing accursed will be found there any more. But the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and God's servants will worship;

⁴~~They will see God's face,~~ and God's name will be on their foreheads.

⁵And there will be no more night; they need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever.

GOSPEL SCRIPTURE JOHN 14:23-29

Jesus answered him, "Those who love me will keep my word, and our Abba God will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them.

²⁴Whoever does not love me does not keep my words; and the word that you hear is not mine, but is from God who sent me.

²⁵I have said these things to you while I am still with you. ²⁶But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom our Abba God will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you.

²⁷I Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.

²⁸You heard me say to you, 'I am going away, and I am coming to you.' If you loved me, you would rejoice that I am going to our Abba God, because our God is greater than I.

²⁹And now I have told you this before it occurs, so that when it does occur, you may believe.