

**Sermon Preached
by Doug King
August 24th, 2003
Psalm 84**

"It is good to be home." It is a sentence we utter on a number of occasions. This time of year people are often saying it upon returning from vacation. No matter what wonderful corner of the world to which we may have traveled, there is something grounding and comforting about being back in our own space where we belong. Sometimes after a hard day at the office, as we put our key in the lock of the front door, we say it, "It is good to be home." Sometimes we say it when we journey to be with parents or brothers and sisters who are far away. "It is good to be home." Sometimes we say it when we are gathered in a place where we are surrounded by our dearest friends, who truly know who we are, and yet miraculously accept us and love us anyway. "It is good to be home."

Today we heard the words of the psalmist who brings us this message of gratitude for home in terms of our relationship with God. It is very likely that this psalm was sung by pilgrims as they made their journey to Jerusalem and the temple every year. As they made their journey along the dusty roads of ancient Palestine, they were being called to have the same response to both ends of their trip. Not only were they saying, "It is good to be home" on the return to where they lived, but they were also saying "It is good to be home" as they reached the temple, the dwelling place of God.

This is a lifetime challenge for many of us, this seeking to claim God as our home, to recognize that in the midst of the divine is where we truly belong. What makes home such a universally important need for us all? Why do we always seek a return to home? Because, home at its best, is a place where we are safe. Home is a place where we know what surrounds us, from the squeaky floorboard in the hallway to the art on the refrigerator. Home is a place where we do not need to be anyone but who we are. Home is a place where we can lounge around in that awful bathrobe that should have been

thrown out years ago. Home is a place where we are loved, either by those we live with or those we invite into our home.

Now, of course this is the ideal of home. There are many homes that do not live up to this ideal and many times when even the best of homes fall short as well. But when the Israelites were singing this song as they made their way to the temple in Jerusalem, they were singing of the ideal home. And they were making the claim that the ideal home is found in our God.

I love this metaphor of God as home. I just wish I could claim this as strongly as the psalmist does. It is not that I do not believe it is true, I do believe God is our home. It is just that more often than I would like to admit, it is not all that easy to find my way home to God. All too often the journey is filled with intersections along the way by which I am not sure which way to turn. I know that I am looking for my way home to God, I am just not that sure of how to get there.

The Israelites with their strong temple theology had an advantage. They believed that the very presence of God was incarnate in the center of the Temple, the Holy of Holies. For the Israelites, a journey to Jerusalem was a journey to the exact location of God. We, however, do not define God in terms of geography. We have a lovely sanctuary in which we worship and some of us feel closer to God in this space but we do not exactly think of it as the dwelling place of the Lord.

In the New Testament we are told that it is Jesus who replaces the temple as the dwelling place of God. We look to Jesus life, his teachings, his ministry, his death and resurrection, to view the glory of God that was once displayed with stone and mortar. But it is a lot harder to find a home in a man who lived two thousand years ago, Son of God or not, than it is in some specific structure to which one can journey.

However, the incarnation of God into human form, into Jesus, reminds us that we have all been created in the image of God. As foreign and distant as our God may seem

to be at times, we need to be reminded that God is from where we have come. God created us, God fashioned us in the image of the divine. Now obviously for some of us we have fallen a bit from any potential perch of divine perfection. But the people we are at our very core, the people we are beneath the layers of ourselves that life and our mistakes have painted upon us, are reflections of God's glorious love.

And there is only one home for who we really are at the core of our being, and that is with our God. So right now let us remember that even when God feels distant and we feel estranged from the divine, God will be our home. No matter what the twists and turns of this life, no matter how hard we may even try to run in the opposite direction, God is always calling us home. God is always inviting us in to a place where we will be absolutely valued for who we are; to a place where we will feel safe and secure; to a place of love and understanding beyond our imagination.

For now we may need to settle for glimmers and hints of such a place. But in the end we have all been given a promise. One day we will all find ourselves enveloped in the presence of God and we will all say, "It is good to be home." Amen.