

When you go to Google to search from something online, as you start to type, about 10 suggestions pop up. These are Google's best guess at what you are trying to search for. These suggestions are generated based on the most frequently searched for terms. I decided to type in the phrase "home is" to see how most people are finishing that sentence in an internet search. What do you think the first entry was? Home is...what? No surprise right? "Home is where the heart is." One of the surprising suggestions that came up was "Home is where the Doodle is pillow" I wondered what this doodle pillow is that everyone is searching for and decided to take Google's suggestion and look up "Home is where the doodle is pillow. Apparently, lots of people are searching for pillows that describe home as the place where their dog is - specifically, their dog that is a mix between a poodle and a golden retriever known as a "doodle."

I wondered what these two sentiments say about each other and about our concept of home. In both, there is the understand that home is not just a building. A house is not by a "home" by default. Home is not simply an address or where you get your mail. Home is a place where we feel loved and where we have a sense of belonging. Home is a place where we can be our authentic selves - our goofiest, most awkward, uncool, and completely amazing selves.

At some point in our lives, many of us have experienced a sense of homelessness. I don't mean in the physical sense of not having a roof over our heads, but not feeling like we belong anywhere. Not feeling that we have a place or a people with whom we feel a true sense of belonging and acceptance. Now, I don't want to gloss over the very real problem of literal homelessness. I have written and preached before about the lack of services for and the stigma that surrounds people who don't have a place to live. It is unacceptable that in one of the wealthiest nations in the world, that anyone would be sleeping on the street, on park benches, or in their car. In areas like Brainerd and in more rural areas, the number of people without housing is often invisible as folks stay with friends or family, or in their cars. We don't have the urban center where people are more visible. But that doesn't mean the problem isn't here. It just makes it easier for us and our government to ignore it and pretend it doesn't exist.

The sense of homelessness I want to focus on this morning is the spiritual and emotional sense. That feeling of belonging and acceptance and worthiness. I know people who have experienced physical homelessness but still had a sense of being at "home," and I know people who lived in big houses but experienced emotional homelessness. It is a basic human need to feel like we belong, to feel accepted and loved. The one place we should know that we are always loved and accepted is with God.

As Jesus is preparing his disciples for a time when he will no longer be physically present with them, he reminds them of this very truth. “I will not leave you orphaned,” he says. In verse 23 Jesus says, “Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them.” We will come to them and make our home with them. Jesus obviously isn’t talking about building an enormous house so the he and God can move into the guest bedroom with all of his followers. He is talking about this spiritual sense of home. The Greek word translated here as home is “mona” [mo’-nay]. The root of this word which is “meno” [meh-no]. The word meno is translated as “abide” in John 15 when Jesus tells his disciples to abide in him and he will abide in them, that they are as inseparable as branches to a vine. There is a sense of closeness and interdependence in this word. One of the meanings of this root is “to be held continually.” Let’s re-write verse 23 using that phrase: “Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them and we will come to them and hold them continually.” The sense of home in this scripture is an intimate one. With intimacy comes vulnerability.

In her book *Daring Greatly*, author Brene Brown talks about the nature of true belonging. That sense that we are completely accepted and that we fit in. She writes, “true belonging only happens when we present our authentic, imperfect selves to the world, our sense of belonging can never be greater than our level of self-acceptance.”¹ Put into a Christian framework we could say “we must love ourselves because God first loved us. This is the good news for this morning. God loves us without strings attached. No matter how homeless we might be feeling, no matter how unlovable we might feel, no matter how alone we feel in the world, no matter if we are accepted by our family or are considered the black sheep, God not only loves us; God likes us! God likes us so much that God has made God’s home with us, and we can make our home with God.

This is also our call as the church. The church at its best should be the physical presence of Christ in the world. The place and the people in whom everyone has a home. Where the compassion and unfettered grace that come from God are mirrored in everything we do and say and in the way we treat one another. May we not only be that sense of home while we are gathered in this building, but may we carry it out with us, extending that spirit of “home” to those around us.

Let us make our home in God because God makes her home in us, and may we the church, be a place where everyone feels at home.

Amen.

¹ Brene Brown, *Daring Greatly: How the Courage to Be Vulnerable Transforms the Way We Live* (Penguin Random House, 2012), 145.

