

SERMON
Maundy Thursday
Aitkin, Minnesota

Luke 22:1-27
Rev. Darrell J. Pedersen
April 13, 2017

Home. Tonight you are home. And Jesus has saved a place for you at God's Table of Unconditional love. On this night two thousand years ago, **Jesus took the world on for you.** Every ounce of sin, evil and death in this world tried to do Jesus in. The world killed Jesus. But tonight, Jesus is alive and here to welcome you home.

Jesus said it two thousand years ago and he says it again tonight. "**This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.**" And then Jesus says, "**This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.**" "**New covenant,**" that's it right there. This is the day that your **original baptismal papers** were signed by Jesus. This is the day God began the **adoption process** which has brought you into God's family, claimed you as one of God's precious children. And brought you here tonight.

I saw the movie, "**The Shack.**" Throughout the story, the main character, **Mac**, is in pursuit of the childhood he lost and of the little daughter he lost. Too often our lives get stolen away from us. Too often little ones get stolen away from our lives. Mac spent his whole lifetime captive to painful memories and struggling family relationships. This limping, wounded individual had lost his heart. He didn't know where home was. You know the saying, "**Home is where your heart is.**" **Mac didn't know where home was. But, God knew where Mac was.**

Home. Where is home for you? Where is your heart? **Anne Lamott**, in her book, "**Traveling Mercies – Some Thoughts On Faith,**" describes how she, as a little girl, was raised in a home where her parents taught that there is no god. As an adult, she searched for years before she finally discovered God through a motley collection of misfit friends who were believers. Through their love and care, acceptance and healing, at a little, run-down church, **Anne met God face to face.** Early in her book, Anne tells a story relayed by one of her pastors. The pastor

explained that when she was a seven year old child, her little, best friend got lost one day. **“The little girl ran up and down the streets of the big town where they lived, but she couldn’t find a single landmark. She was very frightened. Finally a policeman stopped to help her. He put her in the passenger seat of his car, and they drove around until she finally saw her church. She pointed it out to the policeman, and then she told him firmly, ‘You could let me out now. This is my church, and I can always find my way home from here.’”** Anne goes on to say, **“And that is why I have stayed so close to my church – because no matter how bad I am feeling, how lost or lonely or frightened, when I see the faces of the people at my church, and hear their tawny voices, I can always find my way home.”**

Can First Lutheran be the kind of church that helps people to find their way home? Do you know how to find your way home from church? Do your kids know? Where is home? Home is where the heart is. **You are in the heart of God. Do you know that? Do you really believe that? God does.**

Home. As the years pass, as our kids get older, it becomes harder and harder to get everyone together for the evening meal. Soon enough the kids are grown and gone. Then the parents long for the occasional visits home when everyone can once again gather together around the family table. Tonight, God in Christ invites you and your family, me and all the rest, to **dine at God’s family table.**

Tonight you are home with God. Home is where your heart is. **Home for each and for all of us is in the heart of God.** The world says, **“You have to take care of yourself. You’re on your own.”** God says, **“Welcome home. I love you. You are mine. I will never give up on you or let you go. Welcome home.”**

Parents of fifth graders, parents of kids of all ages, tonight you have brought your kids home. Tonight is not about a religious ritual, a simple milestone that needs to be accomplished in our children’s lives. Tonight is about you and your children, and all of us, **dining at the table of the God** who **dreamt us up, created us, loves**

and cares for us all of our lives and who has **promised to bring us home** to heaven on the day we die. This amazing and gracious God **holds our very lives in God's hands**. This awesome God **died to give us forgiveness, life, hope and joy**. And God promises to **feed us with the true bread of life**, Jesus, every time we gather around this table. And God promises to **equip us to live our lives to the fullest** every day, here and now. And God promises to **be with us** in the **face of every challenge, threat, or heartache** the world throws at us.

Dear parents, our gathering for Maundy Thursday, for First Communion is not simple ritual. Tonight is about **God's promise** to love and care for you and your kids always. Tonight is about **your baptismal promise** to teach and model to your children that **God loves them even way more than you do**. To teach and model for your children that they **can count on Jesus even way more than they can count on you**. And tonight is about **our promise to help you** to teach and model God's love and care happening right here in **this church**, the **Body of Christ**.

We're supposed to help parents teach about Jesus? Were the folks who first dined with Jesus at that ancient Passover celebration perfect? No. One sold Jesus out. One denied him three times. Nine ran away and hid when he needed them most. Only one hung around to care for Jesus' mother, Mary, as Jesus hung dying on that wicked cross. Yet, Jesus, knowing full well what would happen, **sat those sinners down and fed them at his table anyway**. The same is true here today. **Your pastor is a sinner. I don't love and trust God enough. I don't love and serve the neighbor near enough**. None of us does. All of us need to be **welcomed home, forgiven, healed, fed, renewed** and **empowered** for life again and again. Welcome home sinners.

I remember being little and racing to find my place at Mom and Dad's table when supper was ready. I remember growing and marrying and my wife and I having our own table. Gradually we were blessed with our own children. Then Mom and Dad died and there are still days when **I long to sit down and eat with them again**. **By God's promise, that day will come**. Our own kids have grown and left home. I miss them very much. I am excited for Easter when our son, John, his

wife, Maisi, and our two grandsons, Anders and Bjorn, **will dine at our table and at The Lord's Table with us**. Our other two girls and their families will be half a continent away this Easter. But they will still be **welcome at the Lord's Table where they are**. They will be welcome home. . .

Do you know where home is? Do your kids know where home is? God does and God has **a place saved for you and for them, here in this place, and with these people, and in the heart of God**. Jesus said, "**This is my body given for you. This is my blood shed for you.**" **Take. Eat. And Live. Welcome home. God is very glad that we are here.** Thanks be to God. Amen.