

"COMING HOME"

A Sermon By

Philip A. C. Clarke

Park Avenue United Methodist Church  
106 East 86th Street  
New York, New York 10028  
September 24, 1989  
Homecoming Sunday

## "COMING HOME"

TEXT: "Lord, Thou hast been our dwelling  
place in all generations"

Psalm 90: 1

### INTRODUCTION

Home! It's a word that evokes all sorts of memories: parents, brothers and sisters, holidays, holy days, getting ready for school, coming home from school, birthdays, summer vacations, getting ready for Church, Sunday dinner, Christmas morning. Home. An interesting clipping came to my attention the other day. It goes like this:

"A fugitive is one who is running away from home.  
A vagabond is one who has no home.  
A stranger is one who is away from home.  
A pilgrim is one who is on his way home.

One of my favorite nursery rhymes goes like this:

"Little Bo Peep has lost her sheep and doesn't  
know where to find them;  
Leave them alone; they'll come home, wagging  
their tails behind them."

I shall not tarry long with the rhyme, lest some of you think that I have entered my second childhood, although that wouldn't be so bad. We'll linger with it long enough, however, to pick up two strands of life. One has to do with the tug of home. "Bo..." "Don't you worry about the sheep...they'll be back". Yes, the magnet of home will draw them. We want to go home. It's something, I feel, that's written on our hearts.

And the other has to do with the joy of coming home. The sheep will be "wagging their tails behind them". Have you ever watched a lamb wag its little tail. That in itself is a joy.

So the "tug" of home and the "joy" of coming home...both are there in Little Bo Peep and both are present here this morning as you have come in here wagging your tails. Both will be present here as we move through the sermon. There are three pictures I want to paint this morning as we sit here thinking about the freshly painted room that is our church home. Better yet, I want us all to get a brush in hand and sit down in front of an easel to do some painting in the imagination of the heart. Our theme is home. We'll be painting a picture of the family home...and of the church home...and finally of our eternal home.

### FAMILY HOME

We begin with the family home. You can give a house number to it, if you grew up in a city or town. For several summers now I have been spending a bit of time upstate in the foothills of the Adirondacks and part of the joy for me is to go back to those towns and cities which were home for me...being a preacher's kid we moved around. And how wonderful to go back and look at the homes I lived in. What memories come flooding in. Memories that have become even richer as the years have flown by.

The poems of Edgar A. Guest are no longer in vogue. Remember them. They used to be printed in the newspapers, one each day. Some people clipped the columns and made scrapbooks. In some homes, mother read the poem before the children got on the school bus...something of a daily ritual. They were simple and easily understood. They seem to catch up the values of life which are most meaningful. And perhaps his most frequently quoted verse was one which had to do with home. It went something like this:

"It takes a heap 'o living in a house to make it home;  
A heap 'o sun and shadder and you sometimes have to roam,  
Afore you really 'preciate the things you left behind.  
And hunger for 'em somehow - with 'em always on your  
mind.  
Home ain't a place that gold can buy or get up in a  
minute;  
Afore it's home, there's got to be a heap 'o living  
in it."

Our Lord one day long ago told about a young man who was a fugitive, running away from home. In a far country, he began to think about his father and about the family. He decided to return home, but he wondered if his father would welcome him. He was welcomed all right! The Bible says that "when he was afar off, his father ran to meet him".

Toward the end of his life, Sir Walter Scott took a trip to Italy. In poor health, he hoped the climate there might be helpful. One day he was shopping and happened to see a lithograph of Abbotsford - his home on the River Tweed. Tears quickly filled his eyes. He hurried from the shop and started for home as soon as he could get things together. When he reached London, he was unable to stand. On the journey up into Scotland, he lay unconscious in the carriage. But when they came near Melrose, he roused and looked around. He knew he had not many more miles to travel before he would be home. And soon the Towers of Abbotsford came into view, and "he sprang with delight" his biographer writes. He was home. We each have our own picture of the family home, and need it be said that it will ever be most special to us.

#### CHURCH HOME

Let us carefully remove that canvass now, picturing the family home...gently now, for it means more than words can ever describe. Let each of us now lift a fresh canvas to the easel to paint our second picture. This time let it be of our church home. All of us have tender memories, too, of the church home...our church home wherever that may be.

The other evening before the Administrative Council meeting I was chatting with Bobbie Heron and asked her if she knew that hymn that we use to sing;

"There's a church in the valley by the wildwood,  
No lovelier spot in the dale;  
No church is so dear to my childhood  
As the little brown church in the vale.  
How sweet on a still Sabbath morning,  
To list to the clear ringing bells;

Their chimes so sweetly are calling;  
'O come to the church in the vale!"

How many of you know it? I was tempted to ask Bobbie to sing it...she knows it. Remember how the basses use to lead in on the chorus..."O come..come... come..."

And the Psalmist, out of his love for the Church wrote:

"How lovely are thy dwellings, O Lord of hosts. My heart  
longeth, yea fainteth for the courts of my God..."

And then he rose to heights of devotion to declare,

"I would rather be a door keeper in the house of my God  
than to dwell in the tents of wickedness...."

Across the years there have been the "doorkeepers" who have faithfully served in various capacities in the life of the Church, our Church: Sunday School teachers and choir members, greeters and ushers, committee members and committee chairpersons, youth advisors and officers of the women's organizations, trustees and coffee hour hostesses and writers and workers. Men and women who have served the Lord in love and with loyalty.

Not too many years ago I attended a service where one of our Methodist churches was officially being "closed"...after 150 years! A service was held in which they thanked God for those wonderful years and for the witness of that Church which was a home church to many people. But churches, too, come to the end of their days, too, for the church is more than a building. It is people, faithful and loyal people, worshipping God and serving Christ. It almost happened here back in 1945 after World War II. But some people came together and with faith and determination created a miracle that has now blessed many of us. But a church like this...set in the heart of the world's greatest city...ministers to a parade of people. As people leave, so too do people come.

I suspect and hope it is true that our Church is becoming more and more home to us all as the seasons come and go. It doesn't take too long to settle in here and get the feeling that this is home. It takes a few Christmasses and a few Easters and a few receptions of new members and a few baptisms and memorial services and weddings and communion services...and soon this beautiful sanctuary becomes more and more meaningful to us, more precious to us, more home to us. And that's what is happening week by week as we come together in prayer and fellowship and service. It's home and it brings out our best intentions.

There's a church up in Albany that was one of my church homes as a boy growing up. St. Luke's United Methodist Church. I saw it again this Summer. It's in bad shape...the doors were locked up tight...parts of it boarded up. It's in a tough, run down part of our state capitol. I must have been about ten or eleven. I was given the job of mowing the lawn and how I disliked it because of all the dogs around there that did their thing on it. Another job I had was to sweep the sanctuary...first sprinkling sawdust and then sweeping the floor and vacuuming the pew cushions every Saturday morning.

I could walk you right to the family pew in which I sat as a child. I remember a Mr. Sherman who sat in front of us with his daughter. He was in his eighties and often dozed through the sermons and never stood for the hymns. I guess I grew up thinking that was a privilege that came with being over 80. Sit through the hymns. I can picture him reaching into his pocket for a cough drop. I could show you a hole in one of the stained glass windows that I was responsible for - threw a baseball through it. Boy, was I scared. I had to pay the \$3.00 to get it fixed. It's still there...right in the middle of the Bible.

Communion services in that church always made an impression on my young spirit...everyone going forward and kneeling at the altar. Those trays of bread and wine. And the final hymn, the 23rd Psalm, set to the tune of "Crimond" (one of my dad's favorites) and that closing wonderful line, "And in God's HOME forevermore my dwelling place shall be."

OUR ETERNAL HOME            And that's what the Psalmist said, the first verse of that majestic 90th Psalm, "Lord, Thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations". In other words, "Lord, we have always lived in Thee!"

Our parents did. Our grandparents did. Our great grandparents did. For me, the evidence is there. I recall walking around a small town by the name of Masham, located up in Yorkshire, England. I got to see the Church back in July where my parents met and were married and two weeks later sailed for America and a new life. Of all things, would you believe that it's called the Park Street Methodist Chapel. I can walk through the cemetery in that town and see evidence of my great grandparents as well as grandparents who "loved and served the Lord"...and who "lived and moved and had their being in Him". So they helped to build churches and they went on Sunday to services and they listened to God's Word as it was preached by their pastor.

So, lift a third canvas now to your easel and prepare to paint a third picture, this one of our "eternal home". And beneath it, write the line which goes with it, "Lord...Thou has been our home in all generations" - our true home, I mean...our eternal home, our real home, our lasting home.

We're only here for however many years it will be. "The days of our years are threescore years and ten...and if by reason of strength they be fourscore, yet..." So, we live here while. And then one day we move on, returning to God from whom we came when we were born. That's what the poet Wordsworth was expressing in his poem, "Intimations of Immortality".

Believe me, what a thrill it was for Lynn and for me to get to visit Wordsworth's Dove Cottage in the Lake District of England back on July the 8th. Thanks to my cousin Peter (who, believe it or not...resembles Mickey Mantle...once you put a Yankee cap on him) and his wife, Barbara, we had a full day moving around that special part of England. Back in my college days some kind and wonderful professor taught me to appreciate the poems of Wordsworth. He was superb in helping me appreciate truth couched in excellent form. And so once again I found my heart and my being receptive to these words of his,

"Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting:  
The Soul that rises with us...our life's star,

Hath had elsewhere its setting,  
And cometh from afar:

Not in entire forgetfulness,  
And not in utter nakedness,  
But trailing clouds of glory do we come  
From God, who is our home:

We come from Him. We live in Him. One day we return to Him, and when that entire circuit is run, we are home...home...all the way home.

Through many dangers, toils and snares - I have already come. Tis grace has brought us safe thus far and grace will lead us home! And we pray that we all will get home at last. Take these three pictures home with you. They're yours. Hang them in a special gallery in your heart. Guard them well. For they are exceedingly precious. The family home. The Church home. The eternal home.

LET US PRAY

Make us sensitive to Your nearness in these moments together in Your House. May we all get home at last. In the name of the Good Shepherd, Jesus, who gently brings us home. We pray. Amen.

"And all things...whatsoever you shall ask in prayer, believing...you shall receive. And as many as touched Him were made whole!"

"Wait on the Lord. Be of good course and He shall strengthen thine heart. For we dwell in the shelter of the Almighty. He is our refuge and our strength."

"We know that in everything, God works together for good with those who love Him!"

"But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength. They shall mount up with wings as eagles. They shall run and not be weary. They shall walk and not faint".

"God so love the world that He gave His only Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life".

"Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits: who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases".

"Thou wilt keep Him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on Thee: because he trusteth in thee".

"In the name of Jesus Christ, I share with you the Good News: We are forgiven".

PRAYERS / LORD'S PRAYER

O Thou, who hearest prayer, hear our prayers...for others, as well as for ourselves. Touch with healing, O God...Father of us all, those whom we mention in our prayers this hour

- |          |          |          |
|----------|----------|----------|
| 1. _____ | 2. _____ | 3. _____ |
| 4. _____ | 5. _____ | 6. _____ |

...beloved members and friends of this congregation. Comfort the bereaved and the broken hearted among us...and especially be close to \_\_\_\_\_ who in recent days has lost a loved one. Abide among us as a healing benediction. Heal each of us at the point of our deepest need.

Answer the upspoken prayers now offered to thee on the altars of our hearts, spoken in the name and spirit of Jesus, who taught us to say when we pray. For we ask all of this in the powerful name and lifting spirit of Jesus who taught us to say when we pray...

"Our Father, who art in heaven. Hallowed be Thy name. Thy Kingdom come. Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil, for Thine is the Kingdom, and the Power and the glory, forever. Amen"

FIRST INTRODUCTION

The week of toil has ended. Our day of rest is at hand. May the rest and the quiet of this hour of worship refresh our inner life. And may it renew in all of us a sense of God's holy and abiding Presence.

In silence, let each now pray as the heart may prompt.

SECOND INTRODUCTION

Remaining in a prayerful spirit, let us enter now into a time of silent meditation....a time in which we prepare ourselves expectantly...that the Spirit of the living God may be made real to us in this hour of worship.

In quietness, let each now pray as the heart may prompt.

THIRD INTRODUCTION

Remaining in a prayerful spirit, let us enter into a time of silent meditation as we come into the Presence of Him whom our faith declares to be the Source of all life and love, all peace and power, the Source of all hope and healing.

In silence, let each now pray as the heart may prompt.

FOURTH INTRODUCTION

Remaining in a prayerful spirit, let us enter now into a time of silent meditation. In these moments, let us ponder the pattern our lives have been weaving as we come into the Presence of Him whom our Faith declares to be the Source of all life and love, all peace and power, the Source of all hope and healing.

In silence, let each now pray as the heart may prompt.

MEDITATION

We rest our hearts in the Promise of Jesus who said:

"Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn of Me, for My yoke is easy and My burden is light".

"Ask, and it will be given you. Seek and you will find. Knock, and it will be open unto you."

"I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No one comes to the Father, but by Me. If you love Me, you will keep my commandments"

"For I tell you...do not be anxious about your life, what you shall eat...or drink..nor about your body, what you shall put on. Is not life more than food? And the body more than raiment."

"But seek ye first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well."

"For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present...to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature - shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus, Our Lord."

ANNOUNCEMENTS: Sunday, September 24, 1989

A ROSE ON THE ALTAR If you look carefully, you'll see that there's a rose on the altar this morning...and it's there in honor of Spencer James Akers, infant son of Mary Pat Akers and James Akers, born August the 24th - a month ago today - in Lenox Hill Hospital.

VISITORS / GREETING We're always pleased to welcome visitors to our Sunday services...and an invitation to worship with us on other Sundays...to find a church home here with us...is warmly offered.

If you're new to the city and new to the Church...please, be free in the sharing of your name. Fill out a visitor card. Sign one of the Guest Books. Join us downstairs for some refreshments. Work with us, too, in the various programs of outreach.

We've been doing the Lord's work here at this busy corner of His Kingdom since 1837...152 years...our roots are deep in the soil of this part of the city. We minister in the name of Christ and it is in His loving spirit that we greet you on this Homecoming Sunday!

A NEW SEASON We enter today into a new season and we invite you to be a part of it...a participant in those many good things that go on around here from one Sunday to the next. It's a busy Church and a busy season ahead.

There are opportunities for service both here in the Church and also in the community. Take on a job and have some fun with it, remembering that "the more you put into something, the more you're going to get out of it".

Review the announcements in the bulletin on your own...and share in those opportunities where you will...perhaps a growth and study group, or a fellowship occasion, the choir. They're listed there for you. Not listed is the date of our first Rummage Sale of the Fall - October 28th - the proceeds of which go to help others. And also the Church Fair which will be held on Saturday, November 18th.

Present to bring you up to date on the November Church Fair is the Chairperson of it...the coordinator, Jacque Notestine...she did such a good job for us last year and it gives me pleasure to present her to you at this time.

NEW HYMNALS / NEXT SUNDAY Homecoming Sunday is always a time of renewal...a time of looking back...of greeting old friends who have "come in" for this service...how grant it is to see:

1. Paul Kilborn and his friend, Vivian Ely - Richmond area.
2. Phyllis Balk - Katonah
3. Dorleon White Reagan - Syracuse area...former secretary.

Homecoming is also a time of looking ahead. Next Sunday we shall celebrate World Communion Sunday and also begin using the new hymnal of our Church. They're here...and will be in the pews next Sunday morning. Our thanks to all who have made it possible for us to get them...

What we'd like to do today is to ask you to take one of the old hymnals home with you. You'll do us a favor and hopefully the presence of a hymnal in your home will strengthen the tie between your home and your church home. Take one along with you.

KEEP IN YOUR PRAYERS

Friends...continue to keep Eric de Freitas and Fran Ellison in your prayers...both have been in the hospital in recent weeks...both are here today. ..I believe.

I might add that the beautiful arrangement that graces the coffee hour table in the Russell Room is there in memory of Toily de Freitas, beloved wife of Eric who passed away last February....we didn't get this into the bulletin...and I did want to mention it.

Last Sunday: Kim Olivadotti...moving to Washington.  
Plant table at the Fair.

OFFERING

"Show us, Lord, how to give out of our substance and not just out of our abundance".

These words spoken by Pope John on a trip through our city several years ago are certainly in keeping with the spirit of those familiar words of Jesus:

"It is more blessed to give than to receive."

PASTORAL PRAYER: September 24, 1989

LORD, we are people who like to celebrate -

YOU have made us to sing, to laugh and to dance.

WE have our rituals, our anniversaries,  
our birthdays, our festivals,  
our Homecomings.

WE OFTEN remember You, Lord, as the One who came among us,  
and one day long ago in Cana of Galilee turned the water  
into wine. Bring new richness and deep joy into our worship  
and into our fellowship on this Sunday in September.

GUIDE US, LORD, in finding ways to celebrate our past,  
to rejoice in Your hope,  
to be glad in Your Presence.

SOMETIMES, O GOD, we forget about those who have lived before us.

SOMETIMES, Dear Lord, we forget about the many good works of those who have  
prayed here in these pews in other years, who have sung hymns of  
great faith before some of us were born, before some of us made  
our way to this city.

SOMETIMES we easily commit the sin of assuming that everything begins with us.

We drink from wells we did not dig.  
We eat food from farmlands which we did not build.  
We worship in Churches we did not erect.  
We enjoy freedoms we did not earn.

Make us grateful for the heritage of faith that is ours and  
help us to feel our oneness with those of other days who have  
worshipped here and found meaning for their lives.

O GOD AND FATHER OF US ALL, we look ahead with joy and enthusiasm to the days  
of this new month before us, to the adventures and the tasks of  
helping to build your Kingdom in the Fall Seasons that beckons.

BLESS US in that which we attempt to do in Your name. Renew  
that right spirit within us. Deepen our commitment to Christ.

GIVE US the wisdom to see those wonderful ties of love and faith  
that can unite us all - whatever our race, culture, background  
may be. Lenthen our reach and broaden our sympathies.

AND HELP US - we Jesus loved Jerusalem - to love this city that  
so many of us now would call home. In His strong name, we pray.

5. IT Miss Dorothy Denvir: 157 West 85th Street  
New York, New York 10024  
Telephone: nothing listed for her.

Pink card. Letter. Signed a visitor card. Indicated a tie with West Park Presbyterian Church, Amsterdam and West 86th Street. PC will follow along since he greeted her at the door.

6. IT Miss Susan McMillan: 200 East 71st Street, Apt. 15 L  
New York, New York 10021  
Telephone: 517 -9029

Pink card. Letter. First United Methodist Church, Roswell, New Mexico. 24 - 29 age group. Greeted at the door by PC as she was leaving.

7. OT Mr. and Mrs. Dean (Chris) Coons: 3960 No. Peardale Drive  
Lafayette, California 94549

Out of town visitors. Came down to coffee hour and met quite a number of folks. Active in their Methodist Church in California and before that, they were active in the Hyde Park UM Church in Hyde Park, Cincinnati, Ohio. Here on a visit.

#### BACK AGAIN

1. Barbara ??? - Adult Bible Class, German background.
2. Walter ??? - Adult Bible Class, German background.
3. O. L. Locke: 749 -8469 - about his 4th visit.
4. Sam and Betty Wilson: two in a row.
5. Cynthia Koontz
6. Sandra Jung and daughter, Jerry, and son, Jin.
7. Eva Patton
8. Al Thomas: interested in membership.
9. Marie Allain
10. Mimi - here with Reiko Ito.
11. Ebenezer First-Quao: Gorham Hotel. With son, Thomas. (Downs Syndrome child)  
(Ebenezer was her about 10 years ago, active then)

#### FRIENDS FROM FORMER DAYS:

1. Joe Anna Arnett Asher: Colorado
2. Joe King: Kentucky
3. Lisa Ingram: Virginia...but moving back to NYC area (Hoboken right now)

#### FOLLOW UP:

PC to call Dick Rice...shelving; call Carol Hawkins (Pantry); Brenda...Jerry Jung is interested in teaching Sunday School.

VISITORS: Sunday, September 17, 1989

Weather: cloudy, humid, cool...clearing around noon.

Attendance: 157 (130 adults, 27 children)  
(19 at Adult Bible Class)

1988: 155	1982: 202 (HCS)	1976: 165
1987: 148	1981: 180	1975: 175
1986: 145	1980: 155	1974: 153
1985: 175 (HCS)	1979: 240	1973: 138
1984: 174 (HCS)	1978: 185	1972: 108
1983: 190	1977: 170	1971: 129

(HCS = Homecoming Sunday Celebration)

1. IT Miss Kim Connor: 114 East 97th Street, Apt. 5E  
New York, New York 10029  
Telephone:

Pink card. Letter. Early twenties. Pennsylvania background.  
Greeted in narthex before service by PC and others. Hopefully, she'll return.

2. IT Mrs. Robert Gill: 66 East 79th Street  
New York, New York 10021  
Telephone: unpublished number.

Pink card. Letter. She was greeted by PC at door following the service. She said, "I was here about this time a year ago".  
Blonde...hair pulled back.

3. IT Mr. and Mrs. Len (Marilyn) McKeown - Funk: 1735 York Avenue  
New York, New York 10128  
Telephones: 289 -6733

Pink card. Letter. Two children. The three year old daughter is Katherine, and the son who is a first grader according to the visitor card...I didn't get his name. Just moved here in August from Kingswood, Texas (Houston area). United Methodist and looking for a pre-school program for Katherine. PC will call.

4. OT Mrs. Helen Koontz: Newport, California

Insufficient address for a follow up letter. Here from California to see her daughter, Cynthia, who attends most Sundays. Greeted at door by PC. Cynthia has volunteered to help with the Feeding Program. Cynthia's in her early twenties. I'd say.

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