

HOME IS WHERE ...

Matthew 2:13-23 [MW19-31]

Sermon preached by Rev Wayne Thornton at Mangawhai & Wellsford, Sunday 29 December 2019

There's a line in a blues song that goes:

- *Papa was a rolling stone
wherever he hung his hat was his home*
- doesn't sound like a particularly secure basis for family life
it doesn't bode well for the future
for things that can be relied on and counted on

Then there is a cartoon I remember seeing

- two children are talking and one says to the other:
"What touches you most about the Christmas story?"
- the other replies:
"Probably the fact that Jesus was born into a stable family" (think about it!)

Put those two things together

- "rolling stone" and "stable family"
and we get something pretty close to this morning's Gospel reading
- we heard that Mary and Joseph and the baby had to move
and pretty quickly
- yet they remained together, they were 'stable' although on the move

Perhaps this gives us a clue that "home" is not necessarily a place, a building

- that "home" may be more to do with relationships
involves some particular things that happen
is bound up with feelings of security, warmth, welcome
- perhaps this tells us that "home" is not so much
wood and tiles and bricks, curtains and beds and chairs
as qualities, responses, attitudes

There's a story of a boy standing on the corner watching as a building burns

- in spite of the best efforts of the fire brigade
a kindly neighbour puts his hand on the boy's shoulder and says
"Well son, I guess you don't have a home anymore"
- the boy looks up and replies
"We still have a home sir. We just don't have a house to put it in!"

There is a home – all that is needed is somewhere to put it

- that's the message of Christmas for the days after Christmas
something to reflect on, work out, put into practice
- making a home for 'God Immanuel' – 'God with us'

Jesus had a home in heaven

- which he left in order to make a home somewhere else
very early on we see that this new home is definitely not safe
we see that having Jesus make his home with us has another side
- for there are those who resent this intrusion
those who are very disturbed by it
and make life unsafe for others because of this

Yet we see from our Gospel reading that Mary and Joseph did their best for Jesus

- Jesus has no home at this stage except with Mary and Joseph a home which they made after another long journey in Nazareth
- we don't know any details about life in this home in Nazareth or what happened to Jesus there
- because the next thing Matthew mentions is John the Baptist many years later
- so we just have to imagine ...

What we do know for sure is that Jesus back then had no home

- except that which Mary and Joseph made for him
Jesus had no home but that which the love and care of Mary and Joseph provided
- the other thing we know for sure is
that Jesus has no home *now* except that which you and I make for him
- just take a moment and think about that
Jesus now has no other home than the one you and I give him ...

Christmas, the birth of Jesus, is at the beginning of the New Testament

- in the gospel of Matthew, the first book
at the other end of the New Testament in The Book of Revelation
we hear Jesus say:
*Behold, I stand at the door and knock;
if any one hears my voice and opens the door,
I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me.*

(Revelation 3:21)

The message of Christmas for after Christmas is about invitation

- and responding to the invitation to "make a home"

Here's one way that might happen ...

A family had to travel on Christmas Day and stopped for lunch at one of those chain restaurants. The mother narrates what happened:

The restaurant was nearly empty. We were the only family and ours were the only children ... I heard Erik, my one-year-old, squeal with glee. "Hithere," the two words he always thought were one. "Hithere," and he pounded his fat baby hands - whack, whack, whack - on the metal high chair. His face was alive with excitement, his eyes were wide, gums bared in a toothless grin. He wriggled and giggled, and then I saw the source of his merriment. And my eyes could not take it in all at once.

A tattered rag of a coat, obviously bought by someone else eons ago, dirty, greasy, and worn; baggy pants; spindly body; toes that poked out of would-be shoes; a shirt that had ring-around-the-collar all over; and a face like no other, with gums as bare as Erik's. "Hi there, baby. Hi there, big boy, I see ya, Buster." My husband and I exchanged a look that was a cross between "What do we do?" and "Poor devil."

Our meal came, and the banging and the noise continued. Now the old bum was shouting across the room, "Do you know patty cake? Atta boy. Do you know peek-a-boo? Hey, look! He knows peek-a-boo!"

Erik continued to laugh and answer, "Hithere." Every call was echoed. Nobody thought it was cute. The guy was a drunk and a disturbance. I was embarrassed. My husband, Dennis, was humiliated. Even our six-year-old said, "Why is that old man talking so loud?"

Dennis went to pay the check, imploring me to get Erik and meet him in the parking lot. "Lord, just let me get out of here before he speaks to me or Erik," and I bolted for the door. It soon was obvious that both the Lord and Erik had other plans.

As I drew closer to the man, I turned my back, walking to side-step him and any air that he might be breathing. As I did so, Erik, all the while with his eyes riveted on his best friend, leaned over my arm, reaching up with both arms in a baby's pick-me-up position. In the split-second of balancing my baby and turning to counter his weight, I came eye-to-eye with the old man.

Erik was lunging for him, arms spread wide. The bum's eyes both asked and implored, "Would you let me hold your baby?" There was no need for me to answer since Erik propelled himself from my arms to the man. Suddenly a very old man and a very young baby consummated their love relationship.

Erik laid his tiny head upon the man's ragged shoulder. The man's eyes closed and I saw tears hover beneath the lashes. His aged hands, full of grime and pain and hard labour, gently, so gently, cradled my baby's bottom and stroked his back. I stood awestruck.

The old man rocked and cradled Erik in his arms for a moment. Then he opened his eyes, locked them squarely on mine, and said in a firm, commanding voice: "You take care of this baby." And somehow I managed "I will" from a throat that contained a stone.

He pried Erik from his chest, unwillingly, longingly, as though he was in pain. I held my arms open to receive my baby, and again the gentleman addressed me: "God bless you, Ma'am. You've given me my Christmas gift."

["Erik" by Nancy L. Dahlberg
in *A World of Stories* by William J. Bausch]

Christmas is an amazing, incredible, miraculous offer

- an out of this world invitation
- God has come to make a home with us
- and there is a choice to be made
- to respond negatively and violently like Herod
- to respond indifferently like most of the townspeople
- of Bethlehem and Nazareth
- to respond positively and actively like Mary and Joseph
- and so hear the words of promise from Revelation 21:3

*God's home is now with his people. He will live with them, and they will be his own.
Yes, God will make his home among his people.*

Then perhaps we could re-write that song ...

- *Jesus is no rolling stone*
- wherever there's an open door he'll be home*